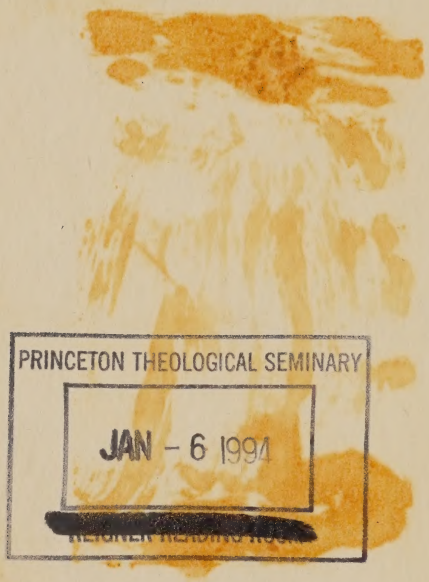
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New Church Programs with the Aging

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New Church Programs with the Aging

by

ELSIE THOMAS CULVER

THE CHARLES G. REIGNER

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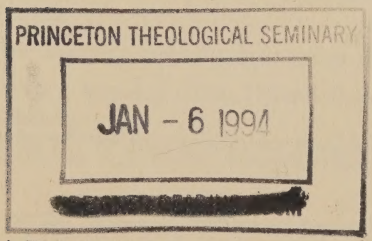

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CHAPTER ONE

Growing Older in a New World

IN a century which history has packed with "firsts," we must make room for one more radical phenomenon, whose result is as yet unpredictable, whose climax is not even in sight, and which concerns, of all people, Grandma and Grandpa—namely, the much longer span of man's life.

The Changing Cultural Background

Of our United States population, 8½ per cent are now over 65; in 1900 only 4 per cent were over 65. A thousand people a day join the ranks of this aging population, increasing both the number and the percentage in relation to the over-all population at a fantastic rate.

Enrollment in institutions of higher learning, which started to bulge after World War I, and our national program of social security, which began operations in 1935, mean that increasingly this older population will have the highest level of education and financial independence any elderly group has ever known.

It is a far cry from Whistler's Mother to Grandma Moses, and though neither is necessarily typical of her generation, together they symbolize the tremendous changeover—in less than a century—in the way older people are thinking about themselves and their place in society, as well as the way others will be learning to think about them. This question of the individual's status as a *person* and his relation to the culture of his time, has both social and religious implications.

For many years to come society will be under obligation to help the oldest segment of its retired population with their problems. As victims of a changing economic pattern, our already really aged people are a first claim on the conscience of their fellow men.

Among those who are reaching retirement today, however, lives are longer and more comfortable, thanks to medical research; minds, on the whole, are better disciplined, at least in relation to today's requirements, because of mass education; the worst economic forebodings are under control, owing to almost universal coverage by social security. The result is the "new oldster," who views his bonus years with considerable satisfaction. Older people today look ahead to more free time, to be used at their own discretion, than their parents and grandparents ever dreamed of having.

Now this is a staggering gift of Providence for which no one is quite prepared. Older people have a feeling that they can scarcely expect society to support them indefinitely—however meagerly—unless they in some manner make themselves useful. They want to find a legitimate, rewarding role that can fit in with today's and tomorrow's cultural patterns.

The churches are, at the same time, recognizing that many phases of aging have religious overtones, and that the religious forces of the community have a definite responsibility in this field.

Many people who have read history feel that how a people uses its leisure time is apt to determine that people's destiny. If so much leisure is to be concentrated in the hands of our older population, if such a large percentage of our gross leisure is to be spent by them, it puts a social and moral burden on them to spend it well, and on the churches to guide and counsel them.

The family, the church, the community agencies—we all are interested in how older people live in the last decades of their lives, first, because we want them to be well and happy; second, because they are forming a new cultural pattern for an increasing segment of our population; and finally, because that cultural pattern is the one which each of us will personally inherit as we, too, grow older.

In patriarchal days, time ran slowly. Three generations could speak the same language, and the older person's accumulated knowledge had pertinence to the technology of the day. In the pioneer family the older person was welcome as an "extra hand" if for no other reason. Today it is different.

Is there a leaking faucet? Call the maintenance man, certainly not grandpa! Is there a sick baby? Grandma may visit him in the hospital where the family carry their group insurance. Aunt Sarah wants to make herself useful preparing the vegetables? She will have to get herself a job in the frozen food plant—and perhaps she will!

Released from many personal obligations, our newly retired person may sink into the doldrums of a material security or, from his vantage point of independence, he may participate in—or start—some new and exciting activity. In one more generation, perhaps in another decade, we may see with some assurance what the new pattern of aging is to be. For the present we are in a period of transition, and our older population presents a mixed picture.

A great deal of research and study has been done on various aspects of gerontology (the science of aging) by state and federal governments, by industry, unions, private agencies, universities. So fascinating has the research become, in fact, that some people are afraid it is overshadowing the application of the findings; they advocate spending more time and effort to use what is already known, toward making our older people's lives happier.

At this practical level of application, the churches feel that they have an important part to play and considerable competence to offer.

The older segment of our population is not made up of categories, but of individuals—each a person in his own right. Certainly subdivisions by chronological age will not be practical. Yet we do need to get an over-all picture of our older people and of the church's relation to them; perhaps we can best do so in terms of their relative dependence or independence.

In Need of Care

There are still, in our society, millions of older people who have reached the point where they can no longer function on their jobs because of age, illness, or industrial taboos, and who are without the communal security that would once have been the older person's right through his relation to his family. The person whose retirement antedated social security benefits (or who was in a formerly "uncovered" occupation) and who is without pension rights from state or private employment, is in a serious predicament. If he is also possessed of a heart or lungs which cannot wait for long-delayed medical aid legislation, one wonders how he has the courage to carry on. The chances are that he will become a public charge.

This man is a victim of social upheaval, or rapid social change. He is an anachronism, relatively worse off because other older people are being reasonably well provided for. His welfare becomes a community problem. Churches and Christian individuals have an obligation to call the attention of the community, at every level, to its responsibilities—to act as its conscience in these matters. The church will instigate and sometimes supplement community aid.

Religious organizations will not, as a rule, wish to duplicate what government agencies are already set up to do. That would be wasteful and in most cases impractical. They have, however, certain indigenous roles even in assuring the individual his minimum physical necessities.

A Stop-Gap Operation. In emergency situations, if

there is really no immediate community aid available, religious organizations and persons will certainly try to help the individual "keep body and soul together." At the same time they will attempt to get the community to assume its rightful obligation. A church visitor may uncover need for immediate aid—specific medicines, special foods, warm clothing—for an older person who has been "too proud" to ask for community help. Church help, given on a basis of human concern, meets the immediate needs. Meanwhile the person is aided in filling out the applications for the government assistance to which he is entitled, while his mental blocks to accepting such assistance are smoothed away.

A Pilot Project. In circumstances where the community may seem to be dodging its obligations or ignoring its opportunities, religious organizations can sometimes set up a pilot project to show the way. A group of women in a church could organize a "homemakers' service" which would send selected people (on request) into homes where the normal homemaker is temporarily away or incapacitated, to help for a few hours daily, to advise, refer, hold the family together. Yet even while they are doing this, the women might consider that the work could, preferably, be done through a community social service agency, employing trained personnel. The church would welcome, perhaps help establish, the community program, then withdraw from the field and help pioneer some other venture.

A Program of Specifically Religious Motivation. A religious organization sometimes feels called upon to supplement a community program of material assistance with a parallel program of more specifically religious

motivation. Some churches deem it desirable to set up their own nursing homes, especially where religious services and counseling are minimized or ruled out of secular institutions. Other religious groups feel it is better for the church to work, if at all possible, with existing secular agencies—assuming, of course, that they are technically competent. Church representatives will almost always be permitted to offer a definitely religious ministry to those who desire it, and they can work, if necessary, to try to raise the tone of the institution and increase its concern for the personality of the individuals receiving aid. Church persons working with secular institutions, it should be added, are often amazed to discover how high both technical and ethical standards are.

Legislative Efforts. Church people, as such, will usually acknowledge an obligation to work through legislative channels and to use the persuasion that can be achieved through voluntary associations to make sure that the community is fulfilling its obligation to provide decent food, suitable shelter, and medical care for individuals caught in this changing economy and unable to cope (personally or through family) with the basic needs of their later years.

They will also recognize that certain legislative changes may be necessary to prevent other individuals from continuing to be caught in such predicaments. They will work, for instance, for adequate old age assistance and social security, for more strict regulation of private hospitalization schemes, for better mental hospitals and clinics.

Supplementary Aid for Physical Needs. There are many physical needs of the elderly, over and above subsistence, which the community can hardly be expected to meet, yet which offer real obstacles to the older person's happiness and usefulness—to himself and society. Religious organizations—or their members—can offer supplementary aid which will have meaning far out of proportion to the time and effort expended.

One such need is for transportation. A trip to the doctor's can be a dreaded process afoot, or when a bus change is involved. Some older persons find it taxing to their strength to carry home a bag of groceries. If younger people could conceive how much an hour's chauffeur service, regularly once a week, could mean to an elderly person, they would surely arrange to offer it.

So much, by way of introduction, about the obligation, in the name of religion, to give help and encouragement to those members of the older population who —because of our changing social and economic pattern —find themselves isolated, often uninformed as to their rights under government programs, and obstructed by subsistence living from making the mental and physical effort to be contributing, or even co-operating, members of society. These people are a first claim on the conscience of the religious forces of the community, and especially on the conscience of all who profess belief in the "social gospel."

Finding Help to Help Himself

It is not enough to keep an older person alive—even fairly pleasantly alive. We must use our influence to make sure that society does not put unsurmountable obstacles in his way as he strives to achieve the fullness of life to which he is entitled. More important than what we do *for* the older person is what we make it possible for him to do for himself—and others.

Guidance in Spiritual Life. There are phases of helping the older person to help himself which are appropriate for the church to handle directly. As people grow older, they often take a deeper interest in the meanings of religion, and it is the province of the priest, pastor, or rabbi to guide these older folk in finding the full spiritual meaning of life. Pastoral counseling, the adult Bible class, but most of all the sense of being welcomed into the full warm fellowship of a friendly church—all these helps give courage and inspiration. Whatever special activities may be set up for the older group, full integration into the whole life of a church which maintains a balance of all ages in its activities, is the ideal.

Guidance in Adult Education. Basic to the continuing growth of many older people is continuing education, and this is an area where church and community may well share responsibility. A church counselor may call to the older people's attention some of the possibilities: cultural courses, instruction in hobbies and crafts, refresher courses in one's own field, how-to-do-it courses in business, basic instruction in something which has been a hobby and which might become a major interest during retirement years. Adult schools offer

courses in gerontology itself, and on preparation for retirement. (Or the church could be helpful in getting these added to the curriculum.)

The retiree who expects to travel may choose to study a language or photography; one about to set up a small business may wish to study merchandising; for their own good reasons people may wish to study bee keeping, book binding, home care of the sick, or Chaucer. Few churches would attempt to offer even a few of these courses, but they could very well maintain a referral and advisory service, to help older people find the resources they need. The church might offer to be host to a university extension course.

The church itself might maintain a book and pamphlet shelf on gerontology and related subjects, and loan out materials, or see what could be done about setting up and publicizing a section on "aging" in the public library.

Making Social Life Possible. It is important that older people be encouraged to "rejoin the human race" or to maintain their standing with it socially. One channel for accomplishing this is through the social life of the church. Another is the senior center. When a community-sponsored senior center is doing a good job it might be better for the churches to encourage older members to attend, and also to send volunteers to help at the community center, instead of setting up their own center. But if there is no readily available community center, the church will probably decide to start one, and invite not only its own members but other older people of the community. Or it could offer its facilities to a community organization which wishes to start a

center, or other senior activity, such as a little theater, a lecture or concert series, or discussion groups. A worthwhile senior center—church or community—must of course be far more than merely social; a real center is often a beehive of educational activity and community service, organized and carried on by the older people. We shall have much more to say about this in a later chapter.

Whether it is a question of centers or courses or other services, it should be quite clear to both church and community workers that the help given through the church is not so given in order to build church attendance or the organization of the church. On the other hand, the church has a perfect right to make it clear that the help it gives either directly or through community agencies does have religious motivation—doing the Lord's will and manifesting love for one's fellow men. Church members will not "force" religion on anyone in either church or community setting, but they will reserve the right to discuss religion as openly as they would music or art, and claim also the privilege of inviting friends to their own church services as readily as they would to their own homes.

Counseling Service. Friendly counsel as to what help is available, where and how, is a service the church could well offer to its own members and to all older people in the community. Very few people are aware of the extent of the health and welfare services available. Moreover, the people who most need these services —notably older people—are often too timid to ask, or do not know where to ask. Often they ask the wrong people and get the wrong answers. This leads to in-

convenience and annoyance—at worst, to being seriously victimized. In many cases it may seem desirable to offer this help through an interdenominational council of churches. The church, or council, will also want to follow up these contacts, to make sure the individual finds the help he needs; for, if obstacles arise, as they obviously sometimes will, he may become disheartened and give up. People who have been used to independence, even to receiving deference on their jobs, do not find it easy to ask favors, even if what they ask for is something to which they are entitled. A rebuff from a thoughtless staff person, which would have been ignored or laughed off a few years earlier, may now seem symbolic of a useless and dependent age into which the elderly person imagines he is slipping. Wise church related counseling can help at this most crucial point of retiring—preservation of the individual's self-respect and the strengthening of his will to continue as a contributing member of society. Any program which seeks *merely* to serve, *merely* to entertain, *merely* to coddle, or *merely* to tolerate older people is out of focus, self-defeating, unworthy.

Ready, Willing, and Able

This brings us to the "new oldster."

As we have stated, about a thousand persons a day in the United States achieve age 65. At the present time almost all these "new oldsters" have social security and/or government, union, or company pensions, though the latter may be very small and inadequate. Many have carried life insurance which may be in the

form of endowment annuities. Most own their own homes; many own a car and other "hard" equipment. A goodly number have college or on-the-job technical education. General health, teeth, eyes, have been looked after in school or on the job by company doctors, health plans, public clinics. Many are leaving their jobs not because they have become physically or mentally incompetent in their work, but because economic pressures of a past era of scarcity set up an arbitrary retirement age, which they have now reached.

The person facing retirement is confronted with many perplexing questions: how to live happily on a reduced income; how to invest savings for maximum yield and security; whether to live with relatives, in his own house, in a trailer, or on an ocean liner; whether his change in living habits dictates a change in diet; which hobby he will now pursue as a major interest, and whether for profit, pleasure, or both. Basic to all these questions is, How shall he spend his *time?*

Theoretically every person has always had his allotment of twenty-four hours a day. From a practical viewpoint, however, economic standards and cultural pressures dictate the lives of most middle-agers and *determine* how they spend their time. The older person may have less money to spend, but he can (and still remain a respectable member of society) turn aside from these mounting pressures, especially if he is in doubt about the worth of many of them. Our newly retired person has a better chance to do and be what in his heart he really desires.

It is in helping him determine what he really wants to do and be for the final decades of his life that the

religious forces of our country have a new and challenging responsibility. This guidance should, moreover, begin at an early age and permeate much of his life; gerontologists agree that education for aging can scarcely begin too soon, and seldom begins soon enough.

Will the older adult use his final years only to gratify his personal whims, or in part at least to serve his fellow men? No one begrudges the older person the privilege of slowing his pace, or even his thinking processes—though not all do—as age increases. He may live longer and more usefully if he coddles himself a bit.

What seems to be happening in society, however, is that the middle-aged group is asserting its sole right to responsibility for material production and management. It is a new version of the "white man's burden" concept of empire days. Young people can use the extra years for additional study, and are being called upon to take their responsibility for this opportunity much more seriously.

It becomes a task for the church to help older people match their talents, which they may feel have been ruthlessly discarded by society, with human needs to which society has not yet found the answer. This assignment will call for imagination and religious perspective.

Using the Services of a "Privileged" Older Person. A "privileged" older person, who feels, in spite of his relative material security, that society is bypassing him solely because of his age, may lose himself and find himself in helping others of his age get on their feet. He may want to start a committee on aging in the church and/or community, working through many arms of the church, through community agencies and legislative

channels, to help older people help themselves to achieve a comfortable and responsible status.

He will be a "watchdog," too, to be sure there are responsible seniors serving on both church and community committees and commissions that deal with senior problems. Where surveys are being made (for example, of recreational facilities for the elderly) or plans drawn up (as for senior housing), or standards established (as for nursing homes), our "privileged" senior will make sure there is competent, vocal, persistent representation of the aged. The church must stand back of him in his endeavors, and strengthen his hand—hopefully even financially, for such promotion often involves considerable outlay for expenses which the average retiree cannot afford.

A Service Bureau Manned by Retirees. A group of retired business and professional people under church auspices might be inspired to start a service bureau to offer free advisory and referral service, particularly to other older people. A retired doctor or registered nurse, a lawyer, a financial adviser, teacher, religious worker, social worker, employment expert, an adviser on housing, might organize to help people who come to them; they could operate as a team or as individual consultants in their respective fields. Clients would be helped to isolate and identify their problems, and then be referred to channels where they could find the help they need.

Members of the team might also be available for lectures before clubs or industrial groups, on preparation for retirement, or specific aspects of it.

A Senior Center Operated by Retired Persons. Capable elderly persons are themselves the most logical people

in the world to set up and operate the senior program or center, making sure they offer a chance for fellowship, food for thought, opportunities for service. (This does not mean that they will not include the older middle-agers, who are a welcome addition to any senior group.)

A Recruiting and Training Center for Community Service. A recruiting and training center might be set up in the church for older persons interested in community service. A file could be kept of definite requests for volunteers, and of organizations where the particular talents of older people might prove useful.

Many would-be Scouts or Campfire Girls never have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of these organizations because group leaders are not available. Often there are middle-aged people who would be willing to assume major responsibility for such groups, if a dependable older person would share the work and the fun. Soliciting funds for the community chest offers an opportunity to perform a valuable community service while getting acquainted with the neighborhood. A teacher of current events, English, ceramics, or knitting may be needed at the community center. A folk dance caller or a storyteller may be in demand at the playground.

In some cases a volunteer's own advanced years may enable him or her to be of special help to others. An older "grey lady" might "talk the language" of patients in an old people's hospital and receive a special welcome no less cordial—though different—from the one reserved for young vistors.

Even with careful selection not everyone will fit into the first volunteer job he undertakes, but this is true of

both paid and volunteer work and with workers of all ages. Both the older person and others need to be warned against confusing individual peculiarities or shortcomings with "age" in general. Any study of minorities warns us against transferring judgments about an individual to the whole group of which he is a part.

Sometimes a competent senior cannot afford even the slight expenses involved in volunteer work; a pooled community or council of churches fund is one answer.

Work in the Church for Older Folk to Do. Many older people who are church members will remind us that the church is, itself, devoted to serving mankind, and will say that they can be most useful as they work through the church.

The Rev. Francis House, head of the Division of Ecumenical Action of the World Council of Churches, has suggested that there are many of the pastoral functions of the church which the older members of the congregation might undertake, both among church members and in the community as a whole. Even shut-ins and bedridden persons, he indicated, could be given a constructive role and a sense of usefulness through being enrolled in a guild of intercessory prayer, as explained in Chapter Four.

Now, it seems, we come close to one of the most important services religion can offer in the field of gerontology. Religion can remind older people constantly that whatever their background, their education, financial resources or health, they can, if they will, still demonstrate that giving of themselves is even more blessed than receiving. The church should always emphasize that it is important to share not only material posses-

sions, but talents, responsibility, leadership, the satisfactions of accomplishment. This is education for a happy retirement which begins in infancy.

The church will emphasize also the worth of every individual as a child of God. For the older individual, this will mean retaining his own self-respect and refusing to let rebuffs or slights or even human injustice pull him down into the Slough of Despond. For the "gifted" older person, it will mean maintaining this same respect for the apparently less fortunate members of his own age group, helping them in turn to maintain their own self-respect, creative status, and spirit of service toward others in the community.

For younger people it will mean recognition of the older individual for his true value, overlooking tensions between age groups—or better still trying to resolve any such tensions. It will mean accepting the Lord's plan for mankind that all ages should dwell together on this earth, each making its own peculiar contribution to our history, culture, and happiness, and praising the Lord with one voice.

CHAPTER TWO

The Basic Problem of Economics

ECONOMICS is close to the heart of the question as to why "aging" is considered a "problem" in our generation. If economics is preventing people from rounding out their years in decency, self-respect, service, and love, it becomes definitely a concern of the church.

How Much Do Statistics Tell Us?

Let us look briefly, then, at the economic situation of our older people. This situation is changing rapidly, and is very different for the person retiring today and the one who retired even ten years ago. The segment of the population who came to their older years before social security and some of the new medical discoveries, will be much worse off than even current statistics indicate; the "new oldster," coming to that fateful 65th birthday with health and at least subsistence income, indicates a happy trend in the right direction. Yet problems of housing, prevalence of arbitrary retirement at 65, the national trend toward urbanization, among other

factors, may mean that his economic picture is not so far above the group picture for aging as we might expect.

Much reliable information is available on the economic aspects of aging. Partial census figures from 1954 and 1958 have been published, and a number of reliable surveys and samplings have been made in the interim period. Unless otherwise indicated, the statistics here used are from official government sources, notably *Social Security Bulletin,* published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. See especially "Money Incomes of Aged Persons—a Ten Year Review, 1948-58" (June, 1959) and "Aged Beneficiaries of Old Age and Survivors Insurance: Highlights on Health Insurance and Hospital Utilization, 1957 Survey" (December, 1958).

The Department of Labor has a vast amount of material on the advantages of hiring older people, and the National Association of Manufacturers, the labor unions, and foundation-sponsored research have all contributed to the same subject—with remarkable similarity of findings. Yet the problem is far from being solved, or, one sometimes fears, from being noticeably on the way to solution. We talk one way—act another.

The government, universities, industry, find themselves in rather basic accord not only on the facts and the problems, but on the proposition that the economic aspects of aging cannot be treated in isolation. Many problems require changed attitudes on the part of whole segments of the population. Emotions, prejudices, and human self-centeredness are involved. Yet the churches, except for some interest in homes for the aged, have until recently been slow to recognize the economic side of

gerontology as a concern of religion. Now they are beginning seriously to consider what resources they have or can call upon to help remedy the present neglect and injustices which allow a large percentage of our older population to live in poverty in a time of superabundance, in idleness in an economy of labor shortages.

No one economic pattern is common to all geographic areas of our country. We shall remember, also, that varying traditions of different denominations and cultures will color the special emphasis of each one's response. We can hope, however, that the determination to find the right solution will become common to all people of good will, and guide them as they learn to work together.

It may be interesting to the reader to review a few objective statistics with a minimum of comment, so that he may have the satisfaction of drawing some conclusions independently before reading further. He may also appreciate having certain basic statistics in one place for ready reference, as we proceed with our discussions. These will be found in Appendix B.

In general, the older person's basic economic concerns relate to housing, food, clothing, medical care, and the ability to participate in church and community life by continuing to make at least nominal contributions to causes of his choice. Are the churches informed about specific ways in which these needs affect the lives of older people in society today? And what help can the churches offer?

A Basic Economic Problem

The older person's basic economic problem is simply stated: For the vast majority it is just how to get enough

money to live decently and comfortably, to be able to move unembarrassed in the circle of friends and activities to which he is accustomed, and to have enough discretionary funds, over and above subsistence living, to afford a sense of choice and self-direction.

To have a margin of choice, be it ever so narrow a margin, is all-important. As one poet put it:

> Happy the man who
> In silk or leathern purse retains
> One splendid shilling.

All this does not mean that the older person needs or necessarily desires to live "in the manner to which he is accustomed." If he has learned the futility of collecting trinkets and having them to take care of, it is just as well, for the median income of the man over 65 who has *any* income is probably only a third what he earned during his high-income years. For many this means real privation; for most older people it means strictest frugality.

Need for Housing

The fact that over half the people over 65 own their own homes, debt free, is the explanation of how so many can get along on appallingly inadequate money income —or no cash income at all. This home ownership has its own problems, however; many older people are living in homes which are too large, have upkeep and taxes which are too high, or which are run-down to the point of being a safety hazard. Loans to convert old houses are hard to come by, and zoning restrictions often preclude the logical expedient of sharing a single family dwelling

with persons other than immediate relatives. Builders and banks seldom care to bother, even with FHA loans, to build the small dwelling which would meet the need of most retirees.

All this is, of course, reflected and magnified in the problems of those who must rent, especially those who are alone and poor. In recent decades the churches have built a good many Homes for the Aged. There are some 600 Protestant Homes, 326 Catholic, 83 Jewish. Originally these were for the aged who were well; a physical examination was usually required for entrance, and the person who became incapacitated was moved to a hospital. However, the lengthening life span, with lack of proportionate success in conquering the chronic diseases of age, has increased the number requiring long-term care. There are also more mental patients—many of these in the older age brackets. A U. S. Public Health Service report (1959) on the shortage of civilian hospital beds reveals that 413,000 more beds for mental patients and 261,000 for chronic patients are "essential." Hence, older people who can take care of themselves at all are being forced out of the hospitals and into the Homes, a great many of which are becoming, in effect, nursing homes. The "ambulatory" are finding it increasingly difficult to get into a large percentage of the Homes, and are obliged to stay in their own community. And this, say many gerontologists, could be all to the good.

Surveys made in several Midwestern parishes by the Catholic Church revealed a remarkable ability on the part of members of the parish to care for each other and solve their own problems; but this presumes a group with mutual concern—people who care about each other.

Social workers, from another angle, say it is definitely better for an older person to stay in his own home and community as long as he reasonably can; how long that is often depends on the amount of community service that is available, such as visiting nurses, homemaker service, family counseling.

It would seem appropriate for the church to work through all possible channels to make sure these community services *are* available, so that persons *can* stay longer in their own homes; it must also work to be sure decent dwellings are available for older people in the community, at a price they can pay.

The older church Homes were thought of as an extension of the family home and the church, for persons who were alone or for some reason could not live with their families. However, many of the new retirement projects being built by some of the churches are a completely different story. They offer maximum convenience, sometimes luxury, central facilities for social life and recreation, and a minimum of restrictions. Many of these "manors" are definitely *not* for the low-income elderly and are planned to be self-supporting. The argument is that the older person needs more than physical care and comfort, and that he should not be denied the fellowship that comes from communal living with other people of like background, just because he can afford to pay.

Many churches have recently had good experience building and maintaining desirable middle-income retirement projects—from apartment homes to whole villages. These fill a need, and most of them seem to be very desirable places to live. Costs are within the reach of professional, executive, or managerial retirees, but

there are very few as yet for the older adults who are least able to help themselves.

While building self-supporting manors for their business and professional people, many churches are also building more modest facilities where they can accept people who are on old-age assistance. Other denominations refuse to build or maintain any homes where low-income persons cannot be accommodated.

Lest institutional care be mistaken for being some sort of over-all answer to church responsibility for the aging, it must be emphasized that well over 90 per cent of our older persons live independently or with families in their own communities. Social welfare groups in churches, at all levels, must work to be sure appropriate welfare services are available, and that state and municipal housing projects and urban renewal plans designate a suitable proportion of available shelter at prices low-income elderly can afford. Downtown apartments and hotels fill a real need for older people, and it has been suggested that churches might approach civic-minded owners to set aside a certain number of rooms at modest rentals, perhaps in return for part-time services.

Unless some rental subsidy is available (by government, church, or private agencies) many older people—especially older women, who have the lowest incomes—are forced into third-rate housing. Poor housing adds to any tendency to despondency or a defeatist attitude, which in turn makes a person careless and without incentive to keep up either himself or these unloved living quarters. As the place runs down, so does the occupant. Accidents occur, and sickness. So goes the vicious circle. The church must find ways to step in and break the

circle—through legislation, social action, personal services. It will find many opportunities, once it is aware of and concerned about the problems.

Food Needs

Though food accounts for a large share of the older person's budget, problems connected with it are more than economic. The older woman's mental attitude may determine whether she wanders happily through the supermarket looking for "buys" which she, with the culinary knowledge of her day, can convert into delicious dishes, or picks up a ready-cooked dinner at the frozen food counter. Her knowledge of nutrition, and especially of the needs of the human body as it grows older, will enable her to buy simply and wisely, rather than in a way that will send her to her doctor or leave the contents of her slim pocketbook with a food faddist. Her self-confidence will tell her that there are simple, inexpensive specialties of her own that she can serve graciously to guests, without throttling her instinct for hospitality.

Some ways the church might help include these:

- Speakers and discussions on nutrition and diet in the senior fellowship or other church groups where older people predominate; some attention to these subjects by church visitors to the home.
- Open house in a church facility once a month, to which older people, who find it hard to entertain at home, can invite guests; older people to do the work, serve simply, inexpensively, but attractively—a sort of hospitality demonstration as well as a party.

• There have been suggestions that churches should press our government to make surplus food available to retirees at reduced prices, as it does to charitable institutions. One suggestion is that retirees could receive coupons, good for currently surplus food, in exchange for community services. Every city and county has jobs that need doing, from keeping up public parks to coaching young people in baseball or dramatics, to lecturing on art exhibits. The list of things elderly people could do to make life more pleasant for their communities is inexhaustible, and there are plenty of competent older people who could be of great service in jobs in no wise competing with union labor. The work and sense of accomplishment would be beneficial, and they would welcome an "honorarium" in surplus food coupons. It would seem appropriate for the churches at the national level—so experienced in overseas food distribution—to look into this, and for the local churches, so aware of the needs of the elderly in their communities, to prod them to open up the matter with government agencies.

Clothing Needs

Is it far-fetched to talk of the older person's wardrobe in terms of church concern? No, for it is involved in another one of those psychologic-economic circles that wear a person down, and in breaking which the church can be helpful.

Clothes wear out gradually, and the older person may not recognize them as a problem as soon as he should. He often saves his best and wears something that "will do." Members of senior groups often remark how this

or that person began to "spruce up" after he joined the fellowship. He may not have purchased new clothes, but cleanliness, neatness, and grooming improved. Some senior groups have "charm courses"—for both men and women. Others have courses in dress design or millinery. Sometimes such courses are set up on an interchurch basis, with competent teachers from among their own membership, or drawing in instructors from the adult education facilities of the local schools. Much mutual help is possible: many women can sew very well, but have no one to call in to help with the fitting; others are afraid to try out new and probably becoming styles, but will do so if encouraged by their peers; some women have a knack for remodeling, which they are glad to share.

Need for Medical Care

Dread of the cost of prolonged medical care is one of the most understandable problems of persons living near the subsistence level. A long stay in the hospital, the need for new eyeglasses, dentures, or a hearing aid, creates a major situation in which there is not much opportunity for the older person to help himself. People over 65 require an average of two or three times the amount of hospital care that younger people require, but their income is only about one third as much. For the person who has lived frugally but with satisfying independence, long illness may mean crossing the line to dependence. Unless his need becomes acute, he will probably drag along, hiding his pain or discomfort even from his friends, and making the final accounting far more seri-

ous, medically and financially. It is not only the cost of medical and hospital care—there is the cost of drugs, tempting one to try to get along with home remedies.

All this must be of considerable concern to those who pay homage to the Great Physician. Yet few churches had much to say or encouraged their members to express themselves in the 1960 hearings and debates about proposed government health insurance for the aged. Representatives of government agencies, the American Medical Association, private insurance companies, and politicians were very vocal. Huge sums were invested, and it is likely that much more will be spent when the predicted effort is made to reopen the subject.

Might it not be appropriate for a commission of the best experts from the various denominations to study the whole question of medical care—including cost of drugs—for the aged, and give denominations and local churches some indication as to what is involved? And are there advisers in local churches and councils of churches who could help older people read and interpret the fine print in the multiplicity of insurance policies for people over 60?

The U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, in their pamphlet "Enriching the Added Years," says:

> Hand in hand with economic security is the matter of maintaining the best possible health so that our older citizens may enjoy and gain the full benefit of the added years of life.
>
> The target is to remove the despair, despondency and the deterioration that frequently become inevitable to a

segment of our older citizens when disease and crippling accidents strike.

The best guarantee of healthy and vigorous old age is the development during the middle years, or earlier, of good health habits, proper nutrition, regular exercise and adequate rest. When illness does come, prompt medical care and modern restorative services are essential.

The older population is increasing rapidly and, along with it, our knowledge of preventive medicine and effective treatment and restorative methods. But knowledge alone is not enough—it needs to be applied. Too little of the medical knowledge that exists today is being translated into the help that so many older people need. This knowledge needs to be applied more extensively to reduce the chronic illnesses and infirmities which result in extended periods of disability and helplessness in our older population. More and better organized facilities as well as more and better organized services are required.

Check the number and adequacy of these facilities in your community and this will give a good picture of what needs to be done to enable our older citizens to combat the ever-present threat of sickness and injuries from accidents.

An effective, vigorous community-wide program of health education for our older citizens has provided a successful approach to this problem in many of our communities throughout the country.

"Keep well clinics" for older people have been suggested. A doctor—perhaps an intern in geriatrics—could examine, advise, refer; or a graduate nurse could bind up minor wounds, make diet suggestions, hold safe-living classes, give first aid. All this is further discussed in the chapter on "Effects of Aging and of Religion on

Health." We emphasize here only the financial aspects—the savings to the older person himself and to the community—in the serious illnesses which might be prevented. It would call for some trained volunteers to man such a clinic, and many of these could well come from the churches—especially, perhaps, from younger retirees. It would be appropriate for the churches to spark such a movement in the community.

Need for the Chance to Give

For the religiously oriented person, contributions to his church are normal expenditures. It is a humiliating day when he must cut his accustomed pledge to conform to a reduced income. This is a special time for pastoral counseling; for the assurance that his place in the fellowship is in no way dependent on the amount of money he is able to give. The counselor will also point out ways the new retiree can now give of his time as effectively as he gave of his money in the past. Some pastors will also remember that although most 65-plus people are in the low-income brackets, quite a few are in the highest income brackets. These older people may be glad to have the minister advise them, at this period of their lives when they are setting a new course, about how they can, through a will, perpetuate their interest in the church and other Christian institutions.

Sources of Income

The chief sources of income for older people are social security and old age assistance. Between three and four million people over 65 report wages as a major source of

income, but this includes dependent wives whose husbands are earning wages. Nor do these figures indicate that the wage earners work regularly or full time. The sobering fact is that in spite of all the published surveys and statements by labor, management, and government as to the demonstrated competence of the older worker, and admitting his superiority so far as turnover, accident rates, loyalty, and absenteeism is concerned, the older person, once out of a job, just does not, as a rule, get hired. "Older" in these economic reports means—not over 70 or 60 or 50, but over 45. A man over 45 who is laid off will have a hard time finding a job. Yet wages soar and prices go up, and we hear on all sides the wails of employers who can't find competent help!

A questionnaire sent out by the Office Executives Association of New York, showed that when older people were offered jobs, the work was usually menial and low-paid, requiring no opportunity to use the skills, experience, and judgment which are usually the older applicant's most important assets. The menial tasks on which they were "given a chance" were often ones requiring the physical strength and quick responses which are assets of youth rather than age.

Some states have tried, with varying degrees of success, to legislate against age discrimination in hiring. The U. S. Department of Labor has published reams of factual statements and statistics, and has put specialists on the employment of older people in its offices across the country. Service clubs have sponsored clubs of older executives, laborers, housewives, to try to discover, by mutual diagnosis, where they are making mistakes in their approach. But the prejudice—and prejudice prac-

tically everyone admits it is—persists. If the problem were a purely economic one as to whether or not an older person got a job, this would be serious enough. But in our work-conscious society, our whole appraisal of a man is apt to be on a basis of what kind of paid position he is able to command. We do not give older people paid jobs; then we treat them as second-class citizens because they do not have paid jobs, and do not recognize their volunteer contributions to society for their worth and significance. It is almost as if society had a sadistic urge to see them eat humble pie.

Somewhere in all this there seem to be some basically strange attitudes for a Christian country to harbor. The church could well study this problem at a high and serious level—in the seminaries or an interfaith commission—to discover whether the church has, itself, by commission or omission in its teaching, contributed toward these attitudes, and whether there are steps it may now take to help overcome existing prejudices. The church, which has a record of rooting out deep prejudices in other areas, cannot sit by and see old age become society's new whipping boy.

Pilot work could be done by job counseling clinics in local churches. Persons involved would familiarize themselves with the wealth of material available from the U. S. Department of Labor, U. S. Chamber of Commerce, many union offices, their local State Employment Office. They could work with the Employment Office, local industry, and labor boards to try to understand the situation in their own area. They could try to place older people who want jobs. They could persuade local

ministers to preach on the subject. Probably nothing would happen overnight, though we should not prejudge the possibility. It usually takes time to change attitudes. But this is a good place to start.

Of course every church should set a good example in its own retirement policies.

On a more optimtistic note—people arriving at retirement age from now on will almost all have social security. Congress has consistently broadened the base of social security, and it is hard to know what the future holds in store. There is talk of making a flat over-all payment to everyone over 62, of a sum sufficient for subsistence living geared to a cost-of-living index. It is claimed that the cost to our economy would be no more, since those who do not now receive maximum social security, make it up with old age assistance. But others protest vigorously that the political philosophy behind the two systems is as different as day and night. On this and many other questions in regard to the economics of aging, there will be differences of opinion within the churches. There is room for differences of opinion, but there is no room for indifference. The church's senior group or adult education classes can discuss these questions, offering each person a chance to hear all sides and make up his own mind. Then when it decides that there is an ethical or moral question, or one of human rights and dignity, involved, the informed church will be ready to speak out.

Another way the pastor or church worker can help is to remind members, whether through sermons, teaching, retirement counseling or less formal conversation, that social security provides a subsistence income only. Why

anyone who can do simple sums should expect it to be adequate for all his needs, is a mystery; but people do, and they are shocked when they realize the economic facts of retirement.

Some retirees, as we have mentioned, own their own homes. About 25 per cent of the people under social security also get some private or railroad pension. One person in three has a bank account (usually a very slim one) or an annuity. Some people who have saved steadily are so afraid of dipping into their savings that they might as well not have any. Others live up their social security checks the first week of the month and wonder what they are going to eat the last three weeks. The outspoken comments of one's peers in a senior group seem to help such people as much as anything can.

Some retirees set up "a little business of their own"; if it is an outgrowth of their former occupation, or the commercializing of a long-enjoyed and well-understood hobby, they may even make it pay. But the mortality of small businesses is very high indeed, and the wise retiree moves with caution. There is more to running a store or a farm or a mail order business than meets the eye. On such matters the pastor or church counselor may not want to give personal advice, but he can know or find out where help is to be had, and refer the person to the chamber of commerce, state bureau of small businesses, adult education courses, government publications. He may, moreover, be able to discover whether the person has a genuine yen to start the business he is talking about, or whether he is actually—probably subconsciously—trying to save face because compulsory retire-

ment makes him feel ashamed and without status in the community. In so far as it is the latter, this again points up a pre-retirement educational task for the church.

The Church's Part

In general, then, what can the church do to be of help in the economic problems of aging?

- The members of the local church can continue to treat the retiree as a person—just as he has been treated while he was on the job. During the many changes that come at this time, the church may be the most steadying, stabilizing, and normative influence in his life. Its friendly atmosphere can also help the really old people to stay on their feet and keep functioning. The pastor may ask adults with special competence in housing, job placement, small businesses, investments, to be available to advise older people who seek their help on economic problems, or (usually) to refer them to the proper channels for getting the help they need. Many of the advisers will themselves be retired people. The friendly fellowship of the church can take many tensions out of the older person's life.
- The church must sometimes give direct economic help in emergency circumstances. This is primarily a social welfare problem, discussed in the previous chapter.
- The church can begin quite early in a child's career to call his attention to the fact that there are, all through life, many kinds of satisfactions other than prestige, the paid job, money, or the things that money will buy. This is Christian doctrine which is apt to be under-

emphasized in our materialist-minded society. As they come to their years of retirement, it is hoped that people will discover some of these satisfactions in giving increased Christian service through both the church and community agencies.

• The church itself can set a good example and ask its members to do likewise in their economic relations to older people. It can practice and preach hiring on a basis of competence to do the job. It can consider or suggest to members who are in business that they consider how to use retired people on a part-time or sheltered basis.

More difficult is the problem of exploitation. When is it or is it not exploitation for the church to ask an older person to do on a voluntary basis, or at a very low wage, the very work for which staff members are being very well paid? Yet not to permit this may mean that the older person is cut off from the work he would gladly perform for the church and which would give him a valued sense of belonging.

One answer is that there is always a tendency to use a volunteer of any age on the lowest scale of available work. In one church a top-notch retired public relations man has been patiently—but with waning inward grace—stuffing envelopes for mailing over a period of months, while a young typist, with no flair for promotion, prepares the material that goes into the envelopes. We should always use any volunteer's services at the highest possible level, not give him the job the office or maintenance force finds tiresome. This is particularly true of the older volunteer, who may have some very special

skills which the church could never afford to put on its budget, but which will be graciously contributed if the church will make good use of them.

• The church may set up (perhaps co-operating with other churches or community agencies) pre-retirement classes, job clinics, or employment exchanges. It will not set itself up to compete but to co-operate with public employment offices.

• Many economic matters concerning older people call for public education and legislative action: changes in social security, housing, job discrimination, health insurance, adequate social services. Some of these must be faced on the local level, some on the national. Discussion in church groups is indicated.

It should be the responsibility of older members of the congregation themselves to keep up on these matters, and to keep the church accurately and persistently informed.

Plenty of literature is available free. The U. S. Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare's "Guide to Significant Publications—Studies on the Aged and Aging" (available from the U. S. Printing Office, Washington, D. C.), published in 1956, would be a good place to start. By all means the minister or the committee on aging will want to send for the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare's quarterly *Aging,* for their latest bibliography on aging, and for material that came out of the White House Conference on Aging. The church must be sure to get material from its state committee on aging, its county commissioners, the mayor. It is important that publications quoted be up to date,

for the scene changes with unbelievable rapidity, in both the field of economics and aging, and especially where both are concerned. When the church speaks in this field it should speak with both statistical and spiritual authority, and up-to-the-minute information.

CHAPTER THREE

Religious Education for Maturity

THE sixty-plus group, probably more than any other age group in the church, are being called upon at the present time to do some pioneer thinking, for themselves and for future generations of older people. It is appropriate that their problems be recognized by religious educators.

Religious education involves content, techniques, and the application of religion to life. Let us presume our religious education for all groups will convey accurately the content of our faith, and will use the most modern and effective techniques for doing so; we can then concentrate our discussion on communicating religion to and through people who are either in or approaching their retirement years, in a way that will help them to apply the teachings of our faith to their specific concerns.

We shall focus our discussion in this chapter on three approaches: religious education *for* older people, religious education *by* older people, and religious education *about* older people.

Religious Education FOR Older People

• One's first thought, in speaking of education *for* older people is the *adult Bible class.* At best such a class can be a wonderful source of strength and inspiration. It is often an institution of long standing, with effective leadership and curriculum, welcoming all mature persons to its fellowship.

Recent emphases on courses for young adults have, in some churches, created their counterpart—classes for older adults. In some cases these are made up of elderly people who have really grown *old* together, and may have become citadels of fixed ideas and opposition to change.

Where the pattern is firmly established, perhaps it is best to leave them so, enjoying each other's companionship. Probably they would not be happy in the regular adult class, brought up on biblical interpretation related to history and literary form, on imperatives of the social gospel as related to government programs of social service, on views of religion and health as related to miracle drugs and psychiatry. Nevertheless, segregation of this sort is no pattern for future generations to follow. When the regular adult class has a speaker on gerontology, perhaps this older group can be invited. Perhaps evidence that the church is genuinely interested in its older people will bring them back into a fuller participation in the full program of the church.

The Scriptures have much to say about the worth of every individual in the sight of God; about the gift of power, endowed by the Holy Spirit, to carry out even the Lord's most difficult demands; about the imperative

to help others; and all these subjects take on special meaning as a person faces the last decades of life. Immortality, the laying up for one's self of treasure in heaven rather than on earth, the great missionary commission of the church, promotion of peace on earth, the ecumenical ideal—all these concepts have theological significance and practical application for the day when one begins looking forward to, or enters upon, retirement.

It would, in fact, be difficult to think of any subject appropriate for discussion in the adult class, from which we could not draw specific implications for the retirement years. There is much to be said, therefore, for the adult class which does not segregate its older members into a special group, but becomes, instead, a cohesive force, binding them with brotherly love into the full fellowship of the church community.

Will the older people try to "take over"? Some will try. Others will use their increasing age to avoid responsibility. Most will be just ordinary participants. There are aggressive and irresponsible members in almost any group, anywhere. The point is not to segregate them, and neither to discriminate for or against older people simply on the ground that they are old. The church, which frowns on segregation of minorities within its fellowship, should recognize both the abilities and shortcomings of its older members, their joyousness and their cantankerousness, their wisdom and lack of wisdom, for what they are—the personal qualities of individuals, not group characteristics of a minority segment of the population.

Gerontologists say that training for retirement, beginning in the middle years, would do much to ease the

hardships, tensions, and anxieties of the sudden break that confronts people in their sixties. Their admonition has religious implications. Why should not preparation for and adjustment to retirement be talked about at rather frequent intervals in the regular adult Bible class? A recurring emphasis, pointing out the implications in each lesson, would probably be better than studying a special unit on gerontology, lasting over a period of weeks. Curriculum writers should have good background materials on aging, and inject the material into lessons where appropriate.

• A few older church members may be religiously gifted persons who all their adult lives have had a *special interest if not experience in one or several of the various aspects of religion,* such as theology, biblical history, hymnology, Christian ethics, religion in the fine or lively arts, archeology, comparative religion, denominational polity, or ecumenical unity. Now they will have time to take up these studies seriously and make something of their interest. Such study is much more stimulating and likely to continue, if there can be discussion with persons of similar interests. In some communities it might be possible to form an interdenominational circle of serious older students to study various aspects of the ecumenical movement. A theological school or a state or local council of churches might help such a study group to get started and suggest leadership. Laymen's schools and conferences, held in connection with theological seminaries, often attract older persons.

• Religious education, for any age, is, of course, not confined to the church school class, and this is especially true for older people. *The sermon, the worship*

service, the counseling service of the church—it is always hard to tell where religious education has its boundaries, if it has any. Neither is the teaching ministry of the church directed to older adults to be confined to its own membership.

Many older people who have dropped away from the church find themselves, in their latter years, seeking *spiritual reassurance* and questioning previous indifference or antagonism to religious matters. In some cases, their being outside the church was originally brought about by an innate honesty which would not permit them to accept theological dogma for which they could find no explanation, or the bibliolotry of narrow-minded teachers, or the disillusioning hypocrisy of some church member—perhaps someone within their own family. Many persons who drop away from the church during their youth, come to realize at maturity that they have been foolishly judging a whole institution—perhaps a whole way of life—by a few unworthy representatives of the institution.

It is, however, very hard for an older person to about-face, walk in, and make himself at home in the neighborhood church he has avoided. The church, moreover, is not commissioned to make him eat humble pie. He will need a friend and sponsor to help him past the initial break-through, and perhaps give him some clear understandable answers to questions which have been bothering him. The pastor will be well aware of his teaching ministry as he meets such wistful persons in his church or in the community. Perhaps he can train certain laymen to help.

- *Bedridden patients* or persons who can seldom leave

their homes will appreciate being adopted, perhaps by a member of the adult class, who will bring them materials and report the class discussions and activities. People who are handicapped or shut-in learn to enjoy things vicariously. This is true, too, of persons in homes and hospitals. Even many who have not before been church members, now long for these contacts.

Some churches are experimenting with the use of tape recordings of bible readings, hymns, or discussions, for such persons. One church-related old people's home has installed equipment to present a full worship service, by closed circuit, to all its bedridden patients. We have promised that this is not to be a discussion of techniques, but one can scarcely refrain from mentioning the long-play "talking Bibles" and the devices for projecting pages of a book, in enlarged type, on the ceiling above the bed of a patient who must lie flat on his back, as real godsends which church groups might make available to their shut-in members.

Religious Education BY Older People

• There has been increasing stress during the past few decades on the young, professionally trained *church school teacher.* The excessive stress on intellectual training was probably a good thing. With the new scholarship pouring its exciting content into the field of religion, the nimble and sometimes reckless minds of youth were just what was needed to help along its acceptance and absorption into our religious consciousness.

Religion has, however, an emotional as well as an intellectual content. Some say it is better caught than

taught, and cite the Sunday school superintendent of "Green Pastures" who was so confusingly identified in the young lad's mind with "De Lawd" himself. No one, they will tell you, would be likely to make such a mistake about the harried young seminary student, working on an hourly basis for his scholarship, and expected to double as scoutmaster and choir leader. Both pictures are of course caricatures. Religion is, moreover, both caught *and* taught; it has both emotional *and* intellectual content. An older and a younger person each has special attributes to bring to the task. And each can supplement his own gifts in ways that make up for his shortcomings and deficiencies.

Older people have one asset that gives them a great advantage: time. Good Sunday school teaching can absorb a tremendous amount of time, if one is to make the most of it. We can argue that this is time well invested for the younger people who take on the responsibility of teaching. However, though they have the best intentions in the world, the pressures of family and social affairs and career opportunities do intrude for the average young-married or middle-ager in a way that is not quite so demanding for the average older person. The older person can frequently schedule more time for lesson preparation, browse over a wider range of supplementary materials, bring about a more personal relationship with the family of the children in the class through planned visits to their homes.

This does not imply, of course, that every person over sixty is church school teacher material. Far from it! It does indicate that there are older people in many congregations—some of whom may never have taught

Sunday school in their lives, who should prove excellent for the task. Especially if they have not taught before, they may be reluctant to volunteer. They may also be too readily rebuffed by individuals who take the attitude that this is "a job for young people"—an attitude the pastor and church school superintendent will watch out for and correct.

Older teachers should be screened to the same high standards as those used for any age group. We are merely pointing out that the over-60 group is a good place to pan for gold. It might be pertinent here to tell about Hastings College of Law in San Francisco, which has built up a wonderful reputation since it adopted a policy of appointing only professors of law who have reached the age of compulsory retirement from similar institutions. Religion, also, may again come to be a subject which we regard as best grasped by mature minds.

In screening we must be sure that prospective church school teachers of any age are able and willing to be guided by the excellent curriculum materials which denominations are now producing. We should be sure that teachers are free from racial, social, economic, or ecclesiastical prejudice that can exist even in church members; that they are mentally lively and stimulating, and at the same time patient and kind.

Older people are less likely to have a house with a swimming pool, where the young people can have parties, or a station wagon to transport the children back and forth to the skating rink. They may not know how to run a movie projector (though they can learn), and may have no certificate in folk dancing. Perhaps all the

desired qualities can never be found in one person. We can, however, pick the best teacher that can be found, regardless of age, remembering that it may be more to the point to supplement good religious education with taxi service, than it is to supplement good taxi service with religious education.

A satisfactory pattern might be to give a well-qualified older person responsibility for actual class instruction, while parent teams agree to take on the social side—parties, field trips, and the like. Somewhere between the two would fall the social service projects, participation in church plays and entertainments, volunteer work for the church, such as decorating the altar, distribution of church bulletins, running a booth at the fair. Division of labor between the teacher and the parent teams would be determined by the qualifications of each, but the scheme would probably work better if areas of responsibility were clearly defined at the beginning of each church year.

A reverse plan might be practical too: why shouldn't a class with a young teacher adopt a grandmother and/or grandfather? There would be many phases of the young people's relation to the church, in which the older people's influence would be invaluable. Of course the class grandparents would want to teach occasionally, and this would relieve the every-Sunday pressure which makes some conscientious persons (for instance, a young mother who knows her children *can* get sick on a Sunday morning) unwilling to assume the responsibility of a class.

• There is also the possibility of the church school as a whole using older people for specific *duties not re-*

lated to a particular class. In one Sunday school, older people call on the homes of pupils who are ill or who for some other reason have been missing classes, taking them materials, discussing the lesson, reminding them of coming events they will not want to miss, talking with parents. Again, the choice of a person to do this is most important. An older person may well have more time to carry through on opportunities which the visit reveals.

A layman often acts as church school superintendent, and this is an appropriate assignment for a capable older person. Even when the superintendent is a member of the paid church staff, it might be interesting to have the Scripture read each Sunday by a retired person whose voice has been a professional asset. Possibly a political leader or an actor could bring out some of the rich beauty that is too often lost in unimaginative, humdrum reading.

• Recent renewed interest in liturgy, symbolism, architecture, and landscaping, as well as religious drama, dance, music, painting, remind us of the *teaching power of the creative arts,* which were once the handmaidens of religion. People who visit the cathedrals of Europe are usually impressed with the way in which stone and wood carvings were used to portray the theological preoccupation of the Middle Ages—the Last Judgment. Adaptations of the miracle plays are coming into popularity. Michael Angelo, El Greco, Blake, speak anew to every generation, of religion as well as art.

Today in every field of art there are competent craftsmen and probably a few inspired geniuses who once dreamed of turning their talent to something beyond

the commercial rut in which their middle years found them. The church needs new and challenging art forms to keep men conscious of their relation to the Almighty in this day of organizational merry-go-rounds, exploding atoms, and vanishing horizons. Perhaps some of the elderly people who once dreamed dreams, but who found themselves doing years of servitude to the commercial demands of our generation, will decide that with retirement they have been providentially released to make a contribution—large or small, great or humble—to the teaching ministry of the church through the creative arts. Here again, an interdenominational art guild, set up through the council of churches, might offer fellowship and inspiration, and suggest appropriate outlets for the members' talents. Activities of such groups have ranged from sponsoring a religious art show, to music classes for underprivileged but talented children, to designing choreography for an ecumenical pageant, to sponsoring an outdoor prayer garden for the city park.

- Finally, older people may perform a valid teaching function in the church by their own example and *day-by-day living:* by the way in which they face the future undismayed, by their faith and hope and charity, by their praise of God and service of man, by their kindly ability to make their immediate neighborhood a little pleasanter place to live. By practice of the ethics and virtues which their faith advocates, older people may become, to all who know them, living symbols of what religion can mean to a human life—and probably this is the last word in religious education.

Education ABOUT Older People

Aging, we have noted, is everybody's business. The first question a person asks a child, after names have been exchanged, is invariably, "How old are you?" Name_____, Age____, are the first bits of information demanded on applications for college entrance, for employment, passports, or death certificates. Chronological age may be very misleading, but it does give a *prima facie* idea—a fact that starts you on your way to knowing about a person.

Growth and development of an individual through a span of time and matter is the most understandable link between religion and science. God chose incarnation as the effective way to reveal himself to mankind —incarnation during the normal life span of a man in the first century A.D. Through all his life, man should grow daily in the knowledge and the image of God, accepting his own worth in the sight of God, and rounding out his career to the fullness of his God-given potential.

• *What light the Bible throws on the subject of aging,* and the significance of anything it reveals in this field for our own era, should fascinate some biblical student about to write a thesis.

• The church can emphasize through its whole teaching program that God made people of *all ages to dwell on this earth together,* that we have no right to condemn each other because of our ages—young or old—any more than we have a right to harbor prejudice against fellow human beings for other causes such as race, language, color of skin, or sex. Instead, we must find ways of all working together to do God's will in this his world.

This might be made graphic by over-and-under-fifty teammates (preferably not of the same household) combining forces to do certain jobs for the church, or through the church for the community.

• The church at all levels needs to know a great deal more about *gerontology*. Church leaders need to study the subject objectively as a science and the church needs to apply what it learns to its own older people.

• The church will teach its children and young people to recognize and *appreciate the special resources and attributes of age*. At the same time, it can constantly remind older people that there are many ways in which, without intruding on another person's life, they can help younger men and women, boys and girls, to achieve a rich and rewarding maturity. The first demand upon them is always to be fully *worthy* of the respect and consideration they demand of youth.

• Most of all, perhaps, the older person needs to learn to *see himself and his problems in Christian perspective,* and it is a responsibility of the church to help him do so.

• *Pre-retirement counseling,* which for one thing helps us to take an objective look at ourselves, is becoming increasingly important in industry and apparently helps a great many people over what can be one of the really disturbing experiences of life. An increasing number of pre-retirement classes are offered by unions or under university extension auspices. The religious education and social action committees of the churches or councils of churches will want to make sure that a religious viewpoint is presented by a competent church representative at such courses; they can usually get themselves invited.

On the other hand, the council of churches might give a pre-retirement course for the community, inviting guest speakers who are authorities on housing for older people, community social service facilities, health after fifty, the cultural and educational facilities of the community (libraries, museums, lectures, night schools), starting a small business, budgeting a social security check, how to make a will or create a trust fund, investing one's time through church or community projects, political and legislative activity for older citizens, making hobbies profitable, fishing (or its mental and moral equivalent).

• It has been suggested that similar results might be accomplished by setting up an *ongoing advisory committee* within the church or church council. Retired professional people—a doctor or registered nurse, an employment expert, a teacher, social worker, lawyer, religious counselor, family relations expert, could form a counseling unit to help people, either as a team or as individual counselors, with pre- or post-retirement problems and refer them to the proper church or community facilities. The members of the counseling team might also be available for lectures or forums on aging.

• When all is said and done, the most basic education *about* elderly people directed *to* the aged themselves, will probably be *by* those who are 60-plus. Only other older persons have "been there" and can speak about aging with the kind of authority which other older people accept as valid. Younger people may teach them technical or cultural subjects, but from kindergarten to our senior adult years, we seem most willing to learn

about ourselves and our immediate personal problems from a trusted contemporary. The older person who by temperament, natural endowments, education and experience, stands out as a leader in the older group within the church, has thereby a great responsibility—not so much to do things *for* his contemporaries (he must protect himself from that!), but to help them to understand and do things for themselves. To this end the pastor will strengthen this older leader's hand in every way possible. Some churches will try to find such *a qualified elderly person to add to the staff for a special ministry to the aging.*

This leader will help his contemporaries in and out of the church see themselves as children of God and, by God's will, the age they are. They will learn to see themselves and their generation in Christian perspective, and also in the perspective of history, which includes our present-day atomic-powered upheavals and adjustments. They will honestly evaluate themselves, their assets, and their inadequacies for coping with some of today's problems. They will assess their social obligations, try to stamp out prejudice in their own lives, and decide whether their pet dogmas are theological treasure or excess baggage on the road to salvation. They will not seek special privileges on account of their age, but will hope, instead, out of long experience, to be able to render special service to God and their fellow men. Whoever can help his fellow "oldsters" along this road, will be a great boon to our senior adults, the church, and the community. Let us be vigilant in searching out such leaders and giving them responsibility.

Government, industry, and labor are almost frantically aware of the responsibilities which man's lengthening life span, plus his changing economic status, place upon us to rethink his relationship to society. The voice of the church, speaking NOW, would bear much weight.

CHAPTER FOUR

Effects of Aging and of Religion on Health

ADDED years do not, of themselves, bring on the condition we normally think of as "aged." Aging is a cumulative process brought about by all the things that happen to a person in a lifetime of living. A person may "age" in certain areas but not in others. He can, for example, have old nerves but a young digestive system; a person who is evenly aged is scarcer than a person with an even all-over tan.

Comparatively few are the changes doctors are willing to attribute to age per se. From the psychological point of view it is important for the older person to know that there is very slight validity in the complaint, "What do you expect at my age? I'm getting *old*."

"Signs of Age"

As a rule, though not invariably, an older person does not grasp a fact or event so quickly as a younger person does (but once grasped he retains it). The rate of repair of tissue is slower (it takes a broken bone, for

instance, longer to heal). Some older people have trouble hearing high-pitched sounds. They may have trouble with motor functions. They are apt to need less sleep, though they may tire more quickly. They no longer reproduce.

That's about it. An elderly person can, however, have accumulated much trouble as he went through life and may bear many scars to his nervous, digestive, circulatory, or other system.

Hence, we learn that over half our 65-plus population have come to retirement years with some more or less permanent or chronic disease or hurt—though by no means always a disabling one—but are less susceptible to contagious diseases (probably having built up an immunity).

All in all, during the past hundred years, life expectancy has just about doubled. Cancer, tuberculosis, heart trouble, mental conditions, and nervous disorders are, however, still with us. These are the problems of the aged. Also we still have crippling accidents.

Decline of physical strength heads the list of ailments that trouble most older people. Fear of becoming incapacitated is worse, they say, than the fear of losing one's job or fear of the social isolation in which they see other older people living. Decline of physical strength is regarded as the basic cause: the other problems follow. The human race has always regarded living to a "ripe old age" as a major achievement. Now a certain number of aging people openly voice their skepticism of an exceptionally long life as desirable. "Only," they say, "if it can be a healthy and active old age."

The health of people coming up to age 65 should actually show up increasingly well in the years ahead, because people now coming to retirement age have had far better facilities for *keeping* healthy through their school and working years than have ever before been available.

"How Sick Is Sick?"

The United Nations publication *Aging Population and Its Economic and Social Implications* (Department of Social and Economic Affairs, 1956) tells us that "barring a spectacular increase in fertility rates, it can be said with certainty that further aging will take place among Western populations at least during the next few decades." (They are, of course, speaking percentage-wise in relation to the entire population.) This is, in other words, "the old folks' inning."

Moreover, the statistic quoted above that half the population come to retirement with some chronic ailment must be viewed with caution. How sick is sick? So deep is the stigma of "losing one's job" that many older people would rather "retire for health reasons" than admit that they have reached the age when acknowledged skills no longer count in the labor market. Yet real illness they are often loath to admit—even when the symptoms are quite evident to everybody else, partly because being "sick" will keep them from getting a job and also because it tends to create the social isolation against which they instinctively try to protect themselves. Clinic patients invariably report fewer ills than the clinic discovers.

The Importance of Motivation

Thus the health problems of the economically underprivileged elderly are very apt to set up their own vicious circle. Surveys seem to show that poor health does not particularly affect the morale of older persons in the high economic brackets, but it has a very depressing effect on those whose incomes are low. Motivation is extremely important. The usually accepted signs of age seem to glance off the person who has an objective in life in which he is profoundly interested. The importance of motivation is developed more fully in the following chapter.

A Senior Health Center

Fear and anxiety beset many older persons concerning their health. They do not know whether what they are experiencing is "normal" or whether they have "symptoms" that need looking after. They hesitate to spend money to go to a doctor, who in the past may have brushed aside their complaints as inconsequential. Yet the commercials warn that early diagnosis is imperative.

It is not only the poor and uninformed who find themselves caught in this dilemma. A book appeared a few years ago entitled *When Doctors Are Patients.* In it a number of prominent doctors tell of their own physical and emotional reactions to diseases they had previously known only through patients, when the same diseases struck them personally. Many of the cases dealt with ills to which the aged are prone. It was interesting

to note that even doctors, when the symptoms are their own, vary between taking them too seriously and not seriously enough.

We have already spoken of the possibility of establishing senior health centers or "keep well clinics" in each community. Such a center could be operated one or two afternoons a week, with an intern in geriatrics or a retired doctor. A retired nurse might be available. The clinic could be managed largely by volunteer personnel, and if necessary with a minimum of equipment.

The clinic would not be for treatment of the chronically ill or acutely ill, but it could make suggestions as to minor aches and pains, treat minor injuries, give suggestions on diet, foot care, physical and mental hygiene. It would make referrals in case of actual illness, in accordance with the nature of the symptoms.

Clinic personnel could warn people against the false promises of "quacks" who prey unscrupulously upon their victims till the ill person's money is gone and it is, perhaps, too late for a reputable doctor to save his life. It could warn them, too, against taking medicines prescribed for their friends because they have what seem to be similar symptoms—but which may arise from very different causes. Through those who come, it could warn those who do not come, about the importance of early diagnosis and the availability of health care when genuinely needed, without pauperization of the individual.

A council of churches could help to sponsor such a center, at a minimum outlay. With the help of a foundation gift, and perhaps in co-operation with a hospital, much more could be accomplished. Or such a center

could become a state health and welfare project, with which the churches could find many ways to co-operate.

The availability of such a center, and the assurance that one could there talk to an interested person, other than the neighbors, about annoying symptoms (which might or might not be something that needed attention) would be a wonderful therapeutic and psychological blessing to the community. A nominal consultation charge—perhaps one dollar—could be waived if necessary, or made voluntary; this fee would help pay the center's expenses.

Especially for persons with chronic troubles, therapeutic discussion groups might have a place at such a center, offering patients with similar complaints a chance to talk about their problems with guidance from a nurse or a doctor. It is to be hoped a religious counselor would always be present at the clinic to talk with those who desire it about personal or family problems.

Hospital and Medical Insurance and Care

The health center such as we have been advocating would not, of course, free older people from their great worry—that they may become ill and have to be hospitalized over a long period of time, with the practical certainty that this will use up all their resources. The proportion of persons suffering from ill health of one sort or another increases in the older age brackets; at the same time their incomes decrease. There is a pronounced upswing in illness after 75. Of 1,000 persons "well" at 45, 10 per cent will require major medical attention within five years. But of 1,000 similarly "well"

at 60, 25 per cent will require medical attention during the next five years. At 70, the corresponding figure is 40 per cent; at 80, 57 per cent; and at 90, 90 per cent. Of course these figures may be somewhat colored by the fact that at least by the time people are 90, someone is very likely looking after them and seeing that they get the medical attention they need.

Many of these persons, in all the upper age brackets, will require hospitalization. Many, however, will not get it. As between using up all their savings in a hospital, accepting charity, or taking a calculated risk on dying, they quite frankly choose the last.

In one survey, 80 per cent of the women over 75 who were interviewed, reported illness; yet only one in three had called a doctor during the past month. Many older people living alone express almost phobic fears of dying alone and unattended—unable to get help, yet they still think they can "manage" without going to a nursing home, where costs would exceed their income.

All this is background for a very distressing fact: *In the 65-plus group only one person in three is carrying any kind of health insurance.*

The glaring need, together with the publicity it has received, has caused private insurance companies to move vigorously into the field with special policies to "protect" the 60-plus group; they promote these policies with high-pressure salesmanship. Some of the policies are good. Many are extremely limited in the benefits offered. Some are cancellable—these should be strictly avoided. Practically all are inadequate, offering a false sense of security. Those within the means of the average person are usually restricted to accident and/or limited

hospital care, and though hospital care is the most severe financial shock to anyone living on a fixed income, we should remember that a doctor's care, in time, could very often prevent the necessity for hospitalization and all its attendant problems.

Speaking of the fact that much could be done—if it were done in time—to delay or prevent the appearance of disabling psychologic signs and symptoms of vascular or senile changes in the central nervous system, Dr. Pasamanick expresses this belief:

> The inactivity secondary to being confined in bed with an illness seems to help precipitate psychosis in the aged. If this is true, then the prevention of illness and rapid, good medical care for disease when it occurs is of utmost importance.... The general inactivity our society has forced upon individuals deemed unproductive and unprofitable also seems to play a role. In any event the social stimulation and increased social status that I would advocate in all areas of life for the aged are valuable in and of themselves. Without them the life to which we have relegated most of this group of the population, and eventually ourselves, is frankly not worth living. This recommendation should permeate all areas of living, including the inextricably intertwined sphere of nutritional deprivation, which singly and in combination with other variables probably plays an important role in mental breakdown.*

What Can the Church Do About Health?

• Within the church, *the warmth of fellowship,* the sense of being accepted and wanted, and the stimulus

* Benjamin Pasamanick, in the *American Journal of Public Health,* Sept., 1959, p. 1131.

of useful activity, constitute a tremendous force for keeping people well and healthy-minded. When sickness does come, the practical help often given by church friends, and the fact that church visitors assure them they are missed by the congregation, are wholesome tonics.

• Let us remember, too, the part preachers and church teachers can play in *breaking down the stereotype* of thinking which, in many minds, relegates all people over 60 to the wheel chair and senility. A person who goes through life thinking about older people in this way is bound to walk into his own trap. When *he* reaches 60, he is almost sure to begin thinking about *himself* in the same terms.

• One of the saddest things about being very old is that one begins to feel useless. We have acknowledged our debt to the Rev. Francis House of the World Council of Churches for the suggestion that shut-ins and even bedridden patients can perform a most important function of the church through the *ministry of intercessory prayer*. Some denominations have yearbooks, listing the names of missionaries and other personnel, and suggesting that there be special prayers on behalf of those listed under each date, on that date. Shut-ins might wish to accept responsibility for special prayers for the persons listed on each day. Or there is a booklet of ecumenical prayers—one for each month, and covering many aspects of ecumenical work. Some will like to follow the various published devotional guides. Some will collect prayers for peace, or for young people, for instance, and make up their own prayer calendars. A supporting group of older people from the church could

furnish such a "legion of prayer" with interesting information about the people and places and movements on whose behalf they undertake this regular schedule of prayer. Dr. House suggests that such prayer groups should be organized in an orderly fashion, and that participating individuals be given a sense of their daily responsibility in carrying out the over-all prayer plan. This is a project in which the minister's counsel will undoubtedly be sought before inaugurating the movement in any church.

• *Legislation relating to health* is a matter churches could take to their hearts. Any church member can easily obtain, at his library, or from the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, sufficient information to enable him to speak intelligently and persuasively to his senators and congressman, and persuade his fellow citizens to do likewise. Many will be able to supplement these facts from the experience of members of their own families or friends. We often ask, "What can we do to help older people?" Pushing for satisfactory health legislation is one specific.

• The sick and the infirm will, however, in spite of our best efforts to prevent or cure their illnesses, probably always be with us. The church has always recognized the gospel imperative to visit and care for them. One of the church's favorite symbols is of Christ as the Great Physician. In most churches there is some *organized visiting of the sick and shut-ins.* It often centers in the Board of Deacons and Deaconesses; a large percentage of their calls are upon the elderly. Each church has its own concept of what a "church call" should mean; each individual has his or her own approach. One can no

more make them conform to a pattern than one can make a blueprint for friendship. Yet in Oregon, visiting has been organized, very successfully, on a state-wide basis, with training sessions under the council of churches.

When the older person is in a hospital or nursing home, the nurse's orders have first priority, and will determine the frequency and length of visits. Cheerfulness and hopefulness are always appreciated and enjoyed, but some older people seem to like their visitors blustery and cordial, while others like them sweet and gentle. Often what a sick person likes depends on his mood on that particular day. The person responsible for training church visitors will suggest that they try to lay aside their own egos, and come to the sick room with friendliness, a sense of humor (distinct from frivolity), and an empathy that responds to the need for serious conversation or understanding silence.

Bringing the weekly church bulletin or the program of some special church event, or bringing flowers from the sanctuary are nice "reasons" for making church calls on a shut-in. In one church a layman makes a tape recording of the Sunday service, which is played back Sunday afternoon in the church-maintained home for the aged. Little gifts are tangible proof during lonely hours between visitors that someone did care enough to call and will, hopefully, come again.

Some visitors find prayer and Scripture reading a natural part of paying a sick call; many do not. Anyone doing regular visiting on behalf of a church will want to discuss this matter with the minister and be guided by his advice. Sometimes in a few moments of quiet,

a deep sense of prayer can be established without words. If Scripture is to be read, it will be the patient's favorite passages, and at his request. Persons with failing eyesight often appreciate being read to.

Shut-ins who live alone often want their visitors to stay indefinitely. And there is often so much that could be done around the house! But only a coward will stay away on the grounds that he can't tear himself away once he gets there. Often shut-ins will be most helped by suggesting some of the available community services such as the visiting nurse, meals on wheels, or homemakers' service. Some members of the church staff should certainly be informed and ready to refer persons to such community services when needed; perhaps they will also have a list of some capable older women of the church who can help in an emergency.

Is the church person's responsibility for visiting older shut-ins limited to visiting members of the church? In one city a commercial firm, in connection with its preparation for retirement program, recruited some of its most dependable older workers and organized them into a corps of visitors for the nursing homes and hospitals in the community. A key group were invited to take a training course continuing over several weeks, given by personnel of the institutions to be visited, social workers, and others. Each of these *trained older visitors* was then put in charge of a dozen recruits and assigned an institution, or a section of one, for which he would be responsible. Whatever religious motivation was involved was coincidental. The company thought this out as a service project designed to keep its own retirees busy and therefore happy. The implication for a possible

service project for the older members of a church or council of churches is self-evident. What do we more than this commercial firm?

• Through much of the world there has been of late a renewed interest—and often controversy—about the question of *spiritual healing*. However critical we may be of some of the activity which has taken place under this banner, an increasing number of denominations are at least permitting responsible persons and groups within their folds to say, with immunity, that we should ask ourselves whether we have been disregarding one of the essential precepts of the early church. This new—protagonists would say very old but recently renewed—interest in healing is a matter involving church doctrine and theological and psychological beliefs and interpretations, but it can scarcely be denied that a great many older people are extremely interested in what the church has to say about it.

One ancient Hebrew precept advised the sick man first to make himself right with God, then if he still felt bad to see the doctor.

Even a generation ago prayers for the sick used to be an accepted part of church worship services; and in many Protestant churches, ill members were prayed for by name. Today the scholarly as well as the devout are asking whether the new sophistication of some congregations, which leaves no room for such practice, should not be questioned. In years ahead, Christian ministers and Christian doctors will probably find opportunity for open-minded discussions of some of these matters.

The whole question is, of course, complicated by the recognition, on the part of unimpeachable scientists,

of a related yet theologically different problem—the psychosomatic nature of a great deal of illness, and of the part which religion can play in bringing many severely ill persons back closer to normality.

• Tremendous sums of money have gone into church buildings during the past decade. During the *coming* decade perhaps we shall ask such questions as how much we should be investing in *church-sponsored nursing homes, and the training of religiously oriented personnel to minister to the residents' spiritual as well as physical needs.* Probably every nursing home for the elderly in the country has a waiting list, and there are thousands in need of this type of care who do not even apply for entrance, because they know that even this simple comfort is still far beyond their meager resources. A nursing home, even with a simple infirmary and outpatient clinic, is not an expensive building to construct, and actually, even with quite a share of the rooms subsidized, can be a good investment; but that is beside the point. If the churches are aware of their responsibility in the healing ministry of the church, here is an opportunity open to them, and it is to be hoped that some will hear the Great Physician say, "I have no hands but yours."

• It is hoped that more and more churches and denominations—and individual builders, too—will see their way clear to sponsor some decent, pleasant, well-planned, small apartments and retirement hotels. They need not be overly equipped with chrome gadgets, but there should be resident Christian personnel as managers. The rooms or apartments should be geared to the needs of low-income individuals or couples, and to their

ability to pay. They would be for people who do not yet need a nursing home, and who, with release from financial nightmares and psychological tensions, will not need special care for some time to come. Such provisions would constitute a preventive measure to safeguard health.

Referring to our statistics at the beginning of this chapter, it would be interesting to place a thousand 60-year-olds in pleasant housing units of this sort in different parts of the country and see how far we could refute that statistic which says 25 per cent are due for major medical care within five years. It would be nice to negate a statistic like that, and many doctors seem to think we might be able to attain such a result. It would be just as good as, or possibly better than, a miracle.

Jesus said, "Greater things than this shall ye do in my name." Perhaps he meant this kind of healing miracle.

CHAPTER FIVE

Worship and Counsel

FOR the satisfactory acceptance of aging and adjustment to its patterns of life, the most important question of all is this: How does the older person think about himself, and what does he himself demand of his later years?

The worth of a man in his own eyes, and in the sight of God, is, moreover, a question to which religion has the first right and duty to speak. This is the church's own responsibility, which it will not delegate. It is a responsibility for the churches as a whole, and for each pastor in particular.

The Challenge of the Aged

Every pastor is aware of the demands for specific types of counseling which come from the older members of his parish. Each year, death of an increasing number of the older person's contemporaries brings sobering thoughts and raises anew the question of immortality. What has one a right to believe—for others and for one's

self? What is the teaching of the church? Is death, indeed, "the most important event in a man's life"?

And as for the present, can one hope for new friends at this age, or must we expect to finish out our days in solitude and loneliness? Is resignation the Christian virtue to be prized above all others as one grows older? Just what do we mean when we pray not so much to be ministered unto as to have the joy of ministering to others?

Instinctively many persons—even those who have not been active in the church—now turn to it for guidance and support. For those who have been outside the church, the move to re-enter its doors is not easy. To do so implies a deep sense of need. It is a challenge to the pastor and the church as a whole, to help such people find their way, unembarrassed, into a true Christian fellowship—not only a fellowship of sociables and sewing circles, but a fellowship of sharing the deepest religious insights, the most perplexing problem.

The church which makes a full religious experience possible for its elders will, moreover, reap a rich spiritual reward through every phase of its life, for they have much to contribute.

One of the fascinating things about older people is that one can never guess what hidden resources they have to contribute. On the other hand, words often fail even the most articulate when it comes to asking for the spiritual help they need. The person who through the years has never acquired self-confidence and vocabulary to express his problems, his misgivings, his hopes and fears concerning forgiveness, salvation, immortality, may be the very one who is feeling most keenly the

need for the reassurance and comfort which the pastor —or a layman acting in a pastoral counseling capacity— can offer. However, there is a delicate line between responding to an unspoken need and imposing one's convictions on another.

We must note, too, that the pastor in today's changing world needs more than mere good will to meet the challenge of the aging in his congregation. It is hoped that at least some training in ministry to today's elderly will soon be given in the seminaries. The pastor's experience with his own parents or grandparents, however good or bad, presumably does not furnish a factual background for the kind of practical counseling he will be called upon to give his older parishioners. Technical questions he can, perhaps, turn over to a social worker or lay counselor, if one is available. But unless he has a more accurate picture than he probably inherited of the lives of older people as they relate to today's society, it may be difficult for him to interpret, with relevance, even the biblical passages which could be of help and inspiration to the old, or which could challenge younger members of the church and community to act on their behalf.

"God created man in his own image": surely it is incongruous to think that the intention was for him to end his days as a poor, decrepit, and useless being.

"He who puts a stone in his brother's way": who is to blame when the retiree, deprived of the opportunity to work (the only thing society seems to value) decides life is not worth living, and ends it?

"Honor thy father and thy mother": does this refer

to the biological family? Or has it something to do with decent housing for the elderly, at prices they can afford?

Personal Counseling

Let us speak now specifically of personal counseling —the person-to-person relationship between the pastor or lay counselor and the older member of the church or community.

Let us begin with those who are quite old and those who, through infirmity or some handicap, are unable to participate fully in the life of the church or its organizations. Some will be confined to nursing homes or hospitals or their own homes; some will still be able to attend church services and occasional social functions (especially if the church has an organized transportation service for its older members).

For most there will be some foreboding about declining physical capacities, and in spite of the brave whistle, some worry and wonder about the days that lie ahead. There is still, hopefully, some time and inclination for fun and entertainment; there is also a time for quiet soul-searching conversation and prayer. The pastor or layman who is adept at this ministry will find it most rewarding, not only from the point of view of what he gives, but from the standpoint of what he receives.

Younger people are sometimes too self-conscious about conversations with their elders concerning the deeper meanings of life. Often the best "counseling" is to ask and receive graciously from the older person his own views on matters of religion. In such telling, he is apt

to formulate in his own mind the very answers for which he is searching. Similarly, the bedridden patient who takes part in a planned program of intercessory prayer for the church's mission program or the refugees of the world, generates, as a by-product, his own therapy. But a dedicated, understanding pastor or counselor is usually needed to get the process started.

Lay visitors or church friends often have the opportunity to urge the timid older person to take up his serious problems with the minister when he calls. As their pastor he would rejoice in having them confide in him and send for him when he is needed.

It is true that older people, being lonely, often want to take up more than their share of a person's time. They "cling." This is a problem against which the pastor, especially, is bound to protect himself on behalf of the rest of the members of his congregation, for his time belongs to all.

When a counselor's ego begins to "purr," it is usually time for him to examine his counseling techniques. What the older person needs is not a prop but an incentive—motivation—to develop to their fullest the capacities with which the Lord has seen fit to endow him, and which remain still at his command.

A concept of increasing importance in fields of education and psychotherapy and of great concern to religion, is this idea of "motivation."

Motivation is man's "reason why"—the taut spring that keeps him operating. His motivation may be conscious or unconscious, worthy or not so worthy. Sometimes his motivation seems to run down for one reason or another; sometimes it keeps ahead of his expanding

life activity. Often his motivations are mixed—his more fundamental and worthy motives can get lost in or are all tangled up with the competitions of business and the shuffle of "keeping up with the Joneses." Retirement is an altogether appropriate time for any person to rethink the motives that govern his life. Deciding what he really wants most of all—what makes his life worth while—will help him to round out his years in dignity and usefulness.

We don't know all about motivation, but we do know it is important. We are told that there are few patients in our mental hospitals in whom an undamaged area of consciousness cannot be discovered, and that through this doorway they can be helped to find relationships between themselves and the outside world, and thus begin to live again. But skilled and devoted help is required to awaken the needed motivation: one must *want* to know about something, do something, be something.

There is more than slight misgiving on the part of educators that except in cases of very perceptive students, day-by-day motivation (that is, motivation close enough to the pupil's life so that he can *feel* it) is a great lack in our modern American school methods.

What motivates the individual's participation in democracy? On the answer could depend the future of free societies.

Now geriatrics is asking to what extent the lessening of skills and capacities often attributed to "age" is in reality a tapering off or let-down not of ability in the individual, but of the economic and prestige motivations which have, in our society, so engrossed the individual during his middle years.

Writing in the *Journal of Gerontology* (April 1958), Dr. Harvey C. Lehman, University of Ohio, explores man's "creative production rate at successive age levels." He bases his findings upon curves showing major contributions made by outstanding scientists at different stages of their careers. He finds we are in danger of "confusing the potential achievement at successive age levels with that which has been realized." Few people, he reminds us, ever, at any age, reach the peak performance of which they are capable. Hence the achievement curves, which show a general tapering off in latter years, "may reflect largely the relative extents to which creative workers within each of the several age groups have made an all-out effort to achieve." He concludes:

> Perhaps the findings imply that, if conditions under which older people do their creative work were made more favorable, their realized production rate would be much higher than it has been heretofore. The assumption would be defensible, perhaps, that these age curves result partly, or even very largely, from the fact that older creative workers usually have been less strongly motivated than have younger ones and that the older age groups more often have found themselves in circumstances much less favorable for eliciting their best potential efforts.

The Christian has always been aware of and paid at least lip service to motives that go deeper than his desire for economic advancement. The church will not try to psychologize him out of his genuine need and right to practical physical security and comfort in his latter years. It will, indeed, stand by his side in any battle to secure justice for his age group (as it would for any

minority). At the same time, however, it can help him to weigh the spiritual and material motivations in his life and adjust the activity of his retirement years to a pattern more in accord with the highest motivations.

Americans of all ages have by no means forgotten the non-economic motives of their lives, yet the man-from-Mars scanning our social scene, could make the mistake of thinking we had forgotten them. The veneer is very thick; we could come to think of it as the real thing. This is a problem with which all Christians should be deeply concerned. The freedom of choice as to how we use our time, which is one of the blessings that come to many of us in our older years, brings us to fresh consideration of the real motivation of our lives.

Time is also now available for the spiritual culture too often crowded out of the middle years—for the period of daily devotions, the reading of some of the great devotional literature of the world, becoming better acquainted with the Bible.

The Crisis of Retirement

The need for senior counseling is not confined to the very old. As the person in his sixties, full of vigor and (he feels) at the height of his capacities, approaches the crisis of retirement, he may feel himself frustrated and bewildered. The new retiree, in his loneliness for accustomed work and companionship, may settle for a far too cheap and meager social, cultural, and even spiritual routine, which will plague him the rest of his life.

Man must learn to expect much from the last decades of his life. It is not fantasy for him to approach 65 look-

ing forward to his most free, productive, and pleasant years. For people to achieve such "golden years" is within the realm of reason and the nation's economic resources. It will, however, take a bit of arranging. This should be a challenge to the retiree both in regard to his personal attitudes and his community adjustments. He will hope to bequeath something better than the *status quo* to future generations of retirees.

All this the church needs to understand. It should help a person to arrive at this crisis of retirement in a sound frame of mind about aging in general, and with a will to work out the best possible future for both himself and generations to come.

The church has a tradition of standing by and offering Christian counsel and guidance in the great crises of life. Let us make no mistake: retirement, today, is a real crisis for most persons, the more so perhaps because in its present form it is a twentieth-century phenomenon, and has no age-old biological or cultural or religious guide lines to help those going through the adventure. Under these circumstances, the church stands under special obligation to help the retiree find and develop sound procedures in the light of the more general basic church traditions.

Counseling Counselors

Counseling families and counseling nurses or others who have the responsibility for institutionalized older persons, is fully as important as counseling the older persons themselves. In some cases clinics for this type of training have been set up by councils of churches in

co-operation with local hospitals. The pastor or church worker who has a talent for training laymen to take over responsibility for a large share of such work, may find that he has more to offer as a secondary than as a direct counselor. In many churches deacons and deaconesses or lay "callers" (frequently themselves active older people) keep up the week-by-week contacts with shut-ins. If this is to be more than perfunctory calling, they will look to the pastor for guidance and inspiration. The pastor will, of course, always maintain a close personal contact with the aged members of his congregation, even when the more frequent contacts are thus delegated. The aged are part of his flock and an important share of his pastoral responsibility.

As the average age span grows longer, churches are going to be faced, more and more, with demands for formal counseling *about* aging. Some of the need for such counseling arises naturally from changes in the patterns of family life. The three-generation family in two-generation housing; problems of mutual respect and consideration between grandparents and children; the exploitation of older adults by inconsiderate middle-agers in regard to housework, baby-sitting or gardening; the tyranny over the whole family of a hypochondriac grandfather; these are just a few of the problems which will be multiplied for the family counselor by the growth of our aging population.

The question will also often arise whether such problems are primarily in the province of the pastor or of the professional social worker. Whichever one carries the primary load will undoubtedly hope for the wholehearted co-operation of the other. The pastor cannot,

however, simply refer such problems and forget them. Once they are brought to him, he will try to help the individuals concerned find the right solutions—either through his own resources alone or combined with referral. He will also ask himself to what extent the problems of one individual are typical of similar problems within the church or community, what is bringing those problems about, and what preventive action it might be possible to take, or instigate, to ward off or mitigate this *kind* of conflict before it arises or becomes acute.

Older persons may come to the pastor or church worker with some of the technical problems of social security, medical needs, housing, and employment. In a previous chapter, a suggestion is made that some of the "privileged" older people in the church or the church council might set up a sort of bureau, to help the older persons of the community to pinpoint their problems, and then refer them to the proper community facilities, following up the referral to be sure the person's wants are satisfactorily met if possible. Members of such an advisory team or bureau would, in the natural course of events, often be called upon for personal advice; it would be the pastor's part to make sure the team members, in addition to technical skills, had the Christian motivation which would enable them to respond to the need. He might wish to set up a special class for these counselors. They would naturally refer persons wishing specifically religious counsel to the pastor of the church of the counselee's present or former affiliation. Knowing when and to whom to refer is always one of the most important aspects of counseling.

With the growing amount of interest in older people,

many large churches will certainly be calling pastors especially for this ministry. It is to be hoped that there will be an increasing recognition of the need for this specialized ministry, and that courses on Christian Gerontology will find their way into more seminaries. Meanwhile much could be done at the local or state level by an ecumenically-minded and religiously trained person serving a number of churches of different denominations in different parts of the area. Thus there could be the beginning of a true ministry to the aging, at an expense that would not be prohibitive for any church which wished to participate. Many pastors, especially perhaps the younger ones, would appreciate having a specialist available as a consultant. A recently retired minister who would take the trouble to inform himself on the scientific facts and practical problems of gerontology, and the community channels for referral, might do a splendid job. A pastor accepting an appointment as minister to the aging might well wish to add some special work in gerontology to his equipment. Many colleges now offer courses in gerontology—though it is hard to tell under what department they will make their appearance. The subject is still an orphan, though a popular one—some people seem to think it may turn out to be an heiress. Good conferences are also scheduled from time to time under various auspices, but one can hardly expect to absorb gerontology in a few days. A wealth of excellent government material will be available for some time to come, in relation to the White House Conference on Aging. Using this material, the pastor might inaugurate group counseling on aging for either preretirees or older people—somewhat similar to the mar-

riage counseling classes which some pastors conduct so effectively.

A Council of Peers

A counseling technique which is being talked about a good deal of late in senior circles has to do with the values which emerge from the small, intimate, and uninhibited discussion group, which may or may not be related to a church or a senior center. There is nothing new about this; mutual advice, encouragement, and correction was the rule in the early church. The jury system is a monument to the trust man puts in the opinion of his peers. Alcoholics Anonymous and YWCA reducing-by-talking (or at least with the help of talking) classes are testimony to the fact that we are open to constructive ideas of people with problems like our own. The freshman who drowses through the professor's morning lecture, can hardly tear himself away from the midnight bull session, where his relatively uninformed classmates are discussing the same subject. Very important experimental work is being done in the "therapeutic communities" of certain psychiatric hospitals here and in England: staff and patients meet together as "people" with certain mutual problems in community living, the essential "authority" of the staff being in the wisdom of the contributions they make to the discussions, and the help they are able to give in bringing out the real nature of the problem.

What is now being proposed as a "mutual counseling group" for older persons is a group of men and women—probably not more than twelve—who meet to talk over some of the new problems that confront them as they

make their adjustment to the different life of their "bonus years." Some of the problems are simple and practical. Some plumb the depths of their religious experiences. The pastor who can join in with such a group, as one of the group, and forsake for the time being any authoritarian tendencies, has much to give and gain.

This raises the whole question of leadership, and to what extent outside—usually younger—staff is desirable. Under some circumstances professional social workers or teachers are indispensable; it is to be hoped a spiritual adviser will always be welcome. There are enough competent older people in the world, however, so that the essential direction and leadership of older adult work should be in their own hands. Yet even such a "conversation circle" as we have described calls for a degree of organization and leadership to keep it from being desultory and pointless. Volunteer leaders from within a group can, moreover, in the name of efficiency, develop far more despotic tendencies than any staff person would dare to exhibit, and with better chance of immunity. Perhaps the only answer is to have it clearly understood from the beginning that leadership contributions are expected from *all,* but that one of the therapeutic functions of the group is to see that no leader dominates. A reading of Gertrude Wilson and Gladys Ryland's *Social Group Work Practice* might help overambitious members.

The value of these peer contacts and conversations would seem particularly well suited to new retirees. At the end of World War I the person born at the turn of the century was just finishing college or came back to

his first job. When in World War II the first atomic bomb broke over Hiroshima, and the wheels of our organization-centered civilization began to grind in earnest, he had (unless he was one of a small minority working in his own business or profession) just about reached the height of his earning capacity. If he managed to hang onto his job, he is now about to retire with social security.

Note, we did not say he is *ready* to retire—far from it! He rationalizes, however, about his health not being up to par, or about having planned all along to go into a little business of his own, or of having lived for the day when he could spend all his time fishing.

If he is the average person, he has actually made few if any plans for retirement, and is wondering rather desperately, "What do I do now?" One of his problems undoubtedly stems from his loyalty to his age group—he will probably remain till the bitter end a champion of their individualistic way of life, which sets him apart more than he may realize from today's organizational, mass-production methods. His problem is not a private one, but one of rapid social change. We need new social patterns for our older citizens, and they should be helping to formulate them.

Older people need "bull sessions" of their peers, where they can talk freely and discuss their problems against a common generational background.

We have mentioned the possibility of courses on retirement in our chapters on economics and religious education. A rather ideal arrangement might be to have lectures by top experts on different phases of retirement once a month, followed by weekly meetings of small

informal groups, who through the give-and-take of informal, uninhibited conversation would seek for the basic Christian imperatives and opportunities arising from the situation discussed, and try to discover attitudes which would help in one's own involvement in the subject.

Perhaps twelve is an ideal number for such a subgroup. Members chosen in rotation, alphabetically, could carry the responsibility for the physical arrangements for each meeting. No minutes need be kept, and it is understood that conversations are not reported outside the group. Conversations will be better rounded, and at this age level only slightly more inhibited, if the groups are coeducational.

These section meetings may well be held in the comfort and convenience of members' homes. An hour of adjournment should be set and adhered to, lest discussions drag on and on, which would discourage some busy people from coming again.

The Therapy of Worship

In our consideration of counseling and group therapy, we have left to the last the very important question of worship, and especially the sermon.

In speaking of the sermon we include sermon broadcasts and reports of sermons which appear in the Monday morning newspapers. These may be less than the minister's ideal for worship and counsel, but they do reach thousands who are as yet too timid to come closer, and they should not be scorned. Both broadcasts and newspapers are especially important in reaching older

people who may have lacked transportation to bring them to the service and were unable to walk. (*Why* don't more churches arrange transportation pools for their older members?)

It is hoped that ministers in their sermons will not forget the elderly; it is also to be hoped that few ministers will preach an "old folks" sermon once a year and consider their duty done.

Nor is it sufficient, either, to say that every sermon should have something especially for the young, and something especially for the old, if by that we mean some illustrative material to "please" each age group. The sermon must also, from week to week, demonstrate to each age group in the church (though not necessarily stressing the point of age) their own peculiar contribution to the point being discussed, and their own importance in the church, which is the Body of Christ through whom all things in this world are possible.

In the family of the church where we "share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear," the idea of the worth of each individual in the sight of God should be more than a pious platitude. If we cannot or do not demonstrate the validity of this basic concept in the fellowship of the local church, where is it to be demonstrated? Theological pronouncements lose their validity for the individual who finds his personal experience at odds with the fine words of the pronouncements. The older person who feels himself shunted about, patronized, and ignored, may indeed be a little supersensitive. If he has come under the influence of some of the rabble-rousers, he may be shouting, like the Roman mob, for bread and games, thinking only in terms of rights and

not of the responsibilities of age. Such attitudes, too, are a concern of the church—of both the minister and the fellowship as a whole. It is part of integrating a person into the full fellowship of the church to show him that he must accept a responsible role, and stimulate him to enrich his latter years as well as his earlier ones, with new interests and worthwhile undertakings. The pastor and the church fellowship should, in short, help the older person to see himself in perspective as a person, neither downtrodden nor overprivileged. He will learn to see himself in this way if this is the reflection of himself he sees in the eyes of his fellow Christians. If Christian education about aging, and about the worth of every individual in the sight of God, is part of the week-by-week teaching of the church and Sunday school, bitterness and tensions about aging will be softened, and the inevitable problems of aging in our changing world can be met and settled on their merits to a greater extent than now seems possible.

We have spoken in the chapter on religious education of the fact that all ages need to be taught mutual respect, and that each age group needs to be taught to be worthy of that respect. We like to urge that older persons follow the Prayer of St. Francis, seeking not so much to be ministered unto as to minister.

When we spoke of economics, we remembered that for older persons, too, it is more blessed to give than to receive. This applies to time and leadership as well as money. Both the older people themselves and those who want to help them with their programs will need to remember this.

The minister will be concerned, and try to concern

his older members, with all these ideas. But they are not exclusively for the aging. Even statisticians are coming to the conclusion that most generalizations that are valid for older people can also be made about the human race. Perhaps there will be few *new* ideas which we would ask a minister to add to his sermon material, except a reminder to this youth-centered world, from time to time, that the human race does include older people, too.

One practical warning might, however, be repeated here: the picture in the field of gerontology has changed so rapidly in the past few decades, that even illustrative material regarding aging and older persons should be chosen with care and handled with caution. Fortunately a wealth of new and accurate material is continuously available, including, of course, the material from the First White House Conference on Aging.

Quotes and generalizations in regard to the place and function of the aging in our political and industrial society especially need to reflect the situation today, not even a decade ago.

Cicero (in De Senectute) and Seneca had some rather fresh and stimulating views about aging which can still be quoted. But the trite bromides and sticky verses typical of recent centuries are seldom suitable to today's sermons.

However, the status of an older person as a human being, a child of God, reflecting one facet of God's plan for the human race, and with his own special responsibility for carrying out the Lord's will in his own area of activity—this concept is *not* dated.

If the sermon, the minister's attitude, and the attitude of the congregation in general, reflects this kind of re-

spect and concern for the older members of the congregation, then his church-relationships can give both the truly aged and the person in the crisis of retirement, love, self-respect and courage. It is the prophetic business of the church to stand up for human rights as such whenever they are endangered by thoughtlessness, the pressures of organizational society, or the inroads of power politics. The present concern about aging offers the church one more opportunity to stand in the community as a witness to one basic tenet of both Christianity and democracy—the essential worth of every individual, as a *person*.

CHAPTER SIX

Older People Need Fun, Too

ALL work and no play can make anybody dull and stuffy, including older people.

For fortunate retirees with strong family bonds, celebrating grandchildren's birthdays, taking toddlers to the park, sharing Junior's TV viewing, and helping with family chores, may seem a delightful existence after years of heavy job responsibility and raising one's own family. But grandchildren grow up, and sooner or later the question arises whether Grandpa is taking Willie or Willie is taking Grandpa to the circus. Grandma fits delightfully into some of her daughter's activities—not into all of them. Recreation with one's family is more appreciated if one is not dependent upon them for recreation. Also—a fact the church with its idealism about family life sometimes seems to forget or ignore—a person can live with his family yet be very much "alone," though he does not like to admit the fact.

There are, moreover, legions of older people who are actually quite without ties, at least in the community where they live, and whose loneliness is almost unbear-

able. Reading, TV, and solitaire are poor substitutes for someone to visit with. Those whose lives are full and whose acquaintance is wide, will be more resourceful in finding their own channels of recreation, but often, too, they are the most sensitive about intruding on the fun of younger people. Nor does the fact that one's income makes concerts, the theater, or trips possible really solve the problem—so much of the fun is in planning and recalling—the sharing with someone else.

Old people who live in the past do so because the past is peopled with friends, whereas for many the present is not.

Within the church the need of special recreation for older adults has been accentuated by the increasing life span and the consequent greater number of older people, by the breakdown of the three-generation home which leaves so many older people living alone, and by the increasing departmentalization according to age in the church activity program. The trend toward closely graded recreation as well as Sunday school lessons, does not as yet make sufficient provision for the older generation. A returning emphasis on recreation for the family as a group can help; yet it can also further accentuate the loneliness of a person of any age who is *not* part of a family. This would include a large per cent of the oldest people in the churches.

Because the need for recreation for older people in the church and in the community is such an obvious need, there may be temptation to emphasize it as *the* need. If the senior recreation program is set up with insight and imagination, it can, indeed, be re-creation for many. Even a senior program which offers nothing

more than fellowship and entertainment has value, but it is hoped that few churches will think in these minimal terms. It must also be clear that the church will hardly get its sense of responsibility toward older members completely off its conscience through even a very fine recreation program: recreation is not *the* need but an important one of a number of essential needs which merge and overlap. A glance at the table of contents of this volume will make the point.

A satisfactory church or community senior program will have leadership—staff or volunteer—thinking in terms of rehabilitation, remotivation, the therapeutic value of group activity and discussion, and helping members of all ages to assume responsible roles for helping themselves and each other. It may be under a recreation budget, yet the discussion group of such a center may be an effective channel for calling attention to the church's legislative responsibility in the field of housing and health insurance, or to needed programs of community social service. The members can undertake a study of the United Nations, focusing, perhaps, on the Declaration of Human Rights, and make speeches or write letters to congressmen and editors as occasion demands. All these projects can be and have been done under the aegis of "recreation." In other words, the work of either a church or a civic senior (recreation) program is usually limited only by its own concept of its function and the attitude and vision of its members—and especially of its leadership. A true re-creational program starts with the people it serves and provides whatever members of that particular group need for their true re-creation. In a privileged group—economically or culturally—the great

need might actually be to discover channels through which they could serve others.

But let us start—as often happens—with a group organized "just for fun and fellowship." There is no special pattern which has to be followed; no reason why such a group has to be organized on a "senior center" basis, if they want something different. However it *is* often organized as a "center" of one sort or another, and this setup gives room, under good leadership, for later expanding a fun and fellowship program to include more serious activities.

This chapter is not about senior centers as such; neither is it about the church's over-all responsibility for the welfare of its older members or older people of the community in general. The whole book is about that. This chapter is about *fun for seniors.*

Every older person should have the opportunity of enjoying some of his fun in a mixed-age group, such as family parties, club or lodge affairs, church social functions. The church, especially, must never be guilty of segregating its older members; it will impoverish itself if it does. But there are times, too, when it is pleasant and profitable to gather together with people of one's own age group, if for no other reason than just to be able to reminisce without fear of boring the younger generations. There are advantages, too, in doing this in a coed situation: older persons living alone do not have much chance for contact with members of the other sex, which is stimulating and agreeable even when one considers himself beyond the "romantic" age.

"Second half century" groups have a great deal to recommend them because they do not make the older

person's social pattern coincide with that fateful retirement date at 62 or 65. There is no time when a person would be in a less receptive mood for an invitation to senior activity than the day after he has involuntarily retired from his job. Women, who often take retirement more gradually than men, or men who have been away from work for some time, can welcome the warmth and friendliness of senior programs. Perhaps in time society will learn to take retirement in its stride—perhaps in time we may learn to make it what it should be, the beginning of a new challenge to creativity and service, which rounds out the individual's earthly career to the fullest. Today, gold watches and testimonials not withstanding, retirement too often brings a sense of futility and shame, harder to bear because one must "save face" by grandiose plans for travel, sports, a business of one's own, or developing one's hidden talents.

Retirement, unless anticipated and prepared for, is a true crisis in a person's life—a deep crisis in our present work-and-income-centered society. If senior recreation groups normally begin recruiting at 50, with the idea that much of the work of the organization will fall upon the shoulders of these younger members, who can taper off their activities according to their strength, resources and inclinations as they grow older, but still keep their sense of responsibility and participation, then the new retiree would be at the height of responsibility in the senior recreation group at the very time he needs this responsibility and fellowship to tide him over the experience of retirement from his job.

Bridges of this sort, that span the valley of retirement, would do much for the mental hygiene of our older

people. It should also be noted that at 50 or 55, many people would join as couples, and that the fellowship of their age peers might help them to meet the even more serious crisis apt to occur in these years—the loss of one's spouse.

Many Patterns—One Purpose

It is not our intention here to go into the techniques of group work. Some of the best material on this subject is available in the files of *Adult Education,* published by the Adult Education Association of the U. S. A., each issue of which includes lists of resource material and publications, and quite likely an article or two especially related to gerontology. Many of the articles not especially directed toward work with older people are also applicable to them. Mention should also be made of *Recreation,* published by the National Recreation Association, which frequently runs articles on work with older adults; and of the work of the National Committee on Aging, which has made a special study of clubs and centers for older people (physical accommodations, program, personnel) with the establishment of standards in mind. A number of denominational church groups have pamphlet material on this subject; some of these are listed in the Bibliography.

Neither shall we try to give a blueprint of the type of organization nor the scope of activity which any individual group should adopt. Normally it seems safe to say that a group of responsible adults should write its own constitution, elect its own officers, and so far as possible do its own work and pay its own bills. However, particu-

larly if the average age is very high, members may feel the need of a staff administrator, especially at the start, to co-ordinate their program. It will be best, however, if this comes about by their own decision.

What sort of person will be most helpful, if one is needed? A retired teacher? A professional social worker? A church volunteer? And what is the ideal age for such a person? Some seniors say they "don't want to be bossed by a younger person." Some say an older person is apt to make her own friends in the group and play favorites, finding it difficult to be impartial and objective. Some say that as in any employment, it is the person, not his age, that is important.

One professional worker, queried as to her function at a senior center, replied cheerfully and without hesitation, "I'm the goat." No one satisfies everyone, and no one knows all about gerontology. However, there is abundant resource material from which to learn. The person called upon to help older people should have, as minimal requirements, an understanding heart and an open-mindedness to scientific facts and findings about aging, rather than acceptance of myths and clichés. Beyond that, each group can probably best decide its own specific needs in keeping with its program and budget, and with the willingness of members themselves to be useful and responsible. Much will depend on the group's officers; if they are chosen with great care they can keep the atmosphere both lively and harmonious.

Certainly it seems that the pastor, or a church committee, should have some oversight of a group which meets in a church, take note of problems of personal relationships, and by wise counsel try to avert trouble

before it becomes serious. Also the church, in training persons to work with older people, can give special emphasis to interpersonal relations.

If the group wants to undertake craft work, story writing, or other special activities requiring professional knowledge, they will have to have good teachers. These are often available through adult schools or university extension program. *Sometimes* there is just the right teacher in the group itself.

A group meeting in an underprivileged part of a big city may require not only a director, but a subsidy for materials and refreshments. At the start it may take on more of the aspects of social welfare, than of recreation as such.

It is another problem to know to what extent a church should think in terms of furnishing recreational facilities primarily for its own members, or for the older people of the community in which it exists. Some people maintain that senior centers should be operated on an interdenominational (or interfaith) basis, preferably through a council of churches. It has been urged that the churches of a congested "inner city" area could undertake few projects which would be more appreciated than to set up an interdenominational senior center to serve all older people in the community, and to reach out through them to the whole community. This could be a wonderful project for one of the country's foundations to sponsor.

A question that frequently arises when a center is operated for the older people of the community, is to what extent discussions on religion, hymn singing, church announcements, and other religious features are

approved or taboo. If the city or the community chest houses the center and pays the bills, then probably the person to whom church talk is anathema has a right to protest, even though church personnel may be carrying the leadership role. Is the church also to be "hushed" when it opens its building for use by a recreation group sponsored by the community and manned by professional city or state paid social service and recreation workers? Things will go much better if some of these questions are faced, openly, and agreements reached at the beginning, rather than sliding over them till they grow into problems.

Roughly the possibilities of church-community relationships in regard to senior programs, each with its own advantages, are these:

- The church has its own program for its own members and pays its own bills, either from the church budget or the members' pockets.
- The church has its own program, to which it invites all seniors of the area (financial arrangements as in the first item here).
- A number of churches, probably through the council of churches, lay out a sort of community program, with a church in each area (of different denominations) housing a senior group, primarily for church people.
- Another plan is similar to the third, but is for all seniors of the community. They may draw upon community welfare, recreation, or adult education departments for staff and equipment.
- Certain churches agree to furnish housing, and perhaps recruit volunteer workers, for programs conducted

by the community (or voluntary service groups of the community).

- Churches co-operate with established community sponsored programs, agree to furnish volunteer leadership, material for classes, refreshments, on a regular participating basis.
- The church, or churches, decide to let well-equipped and manned recreation centers of the city do the recreation job for older people, encouraging their older members to attend and participate. The church can also encourage (rather than recruit) volunteer leaders from the churches, and assure themselves from time to time, as a civic responsibility, that these city-operated centers represent the high professional and ethical level any citizen has a right to demand from city facilities.
- Accepting the pattern immediately preceding this plan, the church or churches may wish to set up a parallel program of senior work within the church itself, dealing not with the play and amusement side of recreation, but with other aspects of older adult work. It is a tenable position to say that if the city provides quite adequate fun facilities, the church need not duplicate these. However, if the civic program is confined to recreation in the narrower sense of games, sports, and parties, then an older adult *program* within the church might still be desirable. There would probably be some overlapping on both sides, but the borderline need not be rigid.

No church should feel that it must include a full recreation or activity program before it can think in terms of fellowship and of service to and through its

older members. In some churches a fellowship of service —from calling on bedridden members to setting up pre-retirement classes, room registries, and labor exchanges —would have more appeal than checkers, especially if there is a good checker league at the nearby city-sponsored recreation clubhouse.

The church which does not have room for craft equipment need not on that account give up the idea of an older adult fellowship in the church, if one seems desirable. A counterpart of the craft classes could be hobby circles—hobbies pursued at home or in the field, but with the experience, techniques, and results discussed and compared within the interest group at the senior meeting. Photography, poetry, art work, scrapbooks for children in a hospital, gardening, would lend themselves to such treatment. Individuals could read or study certain books at home, then review or discuss them in the circle; it might be a classic, a current events magazine, a best-selling novel, a book of the Bible. It could well be a book on some phase of gerontology—opening up whole new vistas quite beyond the limited meaning of recreation, yet fully in line with its true meaning. Some older people will get far more stimulation out of exploring how they can help pre-retirees past the critical period of retirement, than they would out of folk dancing or pottery, and for them the new vistas that open up would be fun. In seeking our fun, especially, it is "every man to his own taste." Otherwise it's no fun!

Fellowship

Wherever they find their recreation, and through whatever channels it is made possible, the one ingredient essential to fun for most people is fellowship. This is probably particularly true of older people, who grew up in an era when "just visiting" was a recognized source of pleasure, and hospitality was established as a major virtue.

Since we have discussed centers in this chapter, though we have taken care not to identify or equate centers, recreation, and fun, we should mention here the "drop-in" center or "the home away from home." This type of center is particularly useful in a community where many older people live in small quarters in which they could not possibly entertain. The drop-in center is a godsend, too, in communities where three-generation living persists, but where the grandparent's quarters are likely to be a couch in a corner of the living room, or a bedroom shared with a teen-ager. Inviting a friend in for tea and a comfortable chat just doesn't fit into the scheme of things. At the drop-in center, which may be only a small room in the church or a whole hospitality cottage maintained by a council of churches, one finds peace, a spirit of friendliness, a bowl of flowers on the table, maybe a fire in the fireplace, a few books of poetry, art, travel or devotional reading, a current magazine or two, and facilities for making a cup of tea or instant coffee. Possibly there is a patio—and a coke machine! The center may be open from one to seven days a week. In a larger facility, there may be a room where games are available. Perhaps there is a photographic display of

church or center activities to show one's guests. The drop-in center may be part of a center with scheduled programs, but of itself it is just for relaxation and hospitality—to be used as one would use one's own living room. A council of churches in even a small city might manage such a unit, or the churches might agree to staff such a room in a civic facility with volunteers who would see that things were kept in order and that the room was reserved exclusively for the older persons for whom it was intended—not teen-agers, not committee meetings.

There might develop, however, small informal groups who would like to discuss with their age peers something of the deeper meaning of aging itself—groups who would come to speak frankly with one another, without inhibition—of the things that are on their hearts and minds. The talk might be of how best to get along with one's daughter-in-law, of what advance preparations it is wise to make for one's death and funeral, or the meaning of immortality and of the universe.

Recreation can lead us along long and diverse paths. It's a lot more than *just* fun.

What Do Older Folk Like to Do?

What sort of fun do older people like? Many of them seem to "get a kick" out of doing the things they liked to do forty years ago, but they are certainly not above trying new ideas, too. Most older people's physical strength is not what it once was, and their responses are not so quick. Some have bad hearts, but do not like to admit it. Some have taken enough real beatings from life so that they can see no point in subjecting them-

selves to being beaten again, just for fun, in a game. A great many older people don't like to be told what to do, even if it is to play, and even if they have to admit it is for their own good.

Any recreation an older person accepts as recreation is probably appropriate, with the exception of strenuous competitive sports—especially team sports where he is under pressure to keep up with the group or admit his infirmities. However, if the nature of his participation is dictated, it probably ceases to have recreational value.

Shuffleboard and horseshoes, chess and canasta, ceramics and weaving, folk dancing, dramatics, and bus trips are standbys; less active persons like movies and slides. Old-time songs and a birthday cake are traditional. One wonders why the list of activities in which the elderly are invited to participate is so seldom stretched.

Mandolin clubs were all the rage when the present 60-plus men were gay young blades. Couldn't they find their instruments in the storeroom (or the salvage shop) and revive some of those serenades?

Who hasn't drawn house plans? And who hasn't his own ideas of appropriate housing for an older person? A design group could have fun, drawing house and apartment floor plans, garden and interior arrangements suitable for mature living.

Beachcombing is a thing most of us have dreamed of having time to do, and in pleasant company of one's own age group, any seashore or lake can yield fascinating treasures. So can an open field or hillside, for instance, in the fall when grasses for drying and unusual seed pods for floral arrangements or one's botanical collection may be gathered.

An armchair travel club would be fun: the participants could pair off for the trip, and collect travel folders, pictures, postage stamps, guide books. Together they would list important places to see, authors to find in the library, or artists from the national galleries of the country of their dreams. They would select mode of transportation, make out their travel schedule, select a wardrobe from magazine ads, get a pen pal; do everything but actually go. At the beginning of the summer, or in the fall, the entire group would have a travel fair, with exhibits from all the armchair travelers to different parts of the globe. Travel agencies would be glad to help with posters, travel films, and other advertising devices. If the armchair travelers have a yen to raise money, they can serve national foods—perhaps have a "spoon dinner" so that people can sample foods from various countries.

One long-term constructive project such as this, lasting over several months, with opportunities for individuals or very small groups to make their contributions to a climax event sponsored by the over-all group, would have some obvious advantages.

One club focuses much of its activity around a yearly hobby show. Crafts, collecting, sewing, poetry writing, painting, scrapbooks—whatever one chooses to do as a hobby can be done at one's own speed and convenience throughout the year, looking forward to its being worked into a display for the hobby show.

Similarly, the drama club might find advantages in giving a variety show instead of a play: small groups could rehearse in the preliminary stages, gaining confidence and polish before they join with the other groups for the final rehearsals and big production. Any plan that

enables individuals to move at their own pace, while still keeping a sense of participation in the over-all group, is good. Play *reading* is fun, too, and does not put a person under tension about forgetting lines and so spoiling the show. Tensions and pressures do not spell fun for most older people, even though they love to keep busy. It is good for anyone to keep busy and interested, but many people believe that the curse of our modern civilization is the stress and tension under which we live. We overdo it! Why inflict *unnecessary* stress and tension on older people in the name of fun?

The Newcomer

Most church recreation groups cordially invite other elderly people of the community to join their activities. A timid newcomer might like to be assigned to some one person to "show him the ropes"—where the washroom is, what the procedure is about lunch, where to find the special activity in which he thinks he would be interested—and of course to introduce him to other members.

Colleges assign a "big brother" or "big sister" to entering freshmen to help the new recruit through the complexities of registration and the first round of social events. One college calls the upper classmen "zippers"—the freshman is zipped into college routine with neatness and dispatch. However, those who volunteer to act as zippers have to attend a series of meetings where they are instructed about their tasks and responsibilities. The most persistent caution which comes out of these meetings is against "possessiveness" and being "overprotective."

A group of mature zippers, given similar basic training, and perhaps meeting once a month as a group to discuss the job and any new developments or problems in relation to it, could be a real asset to almost any senior group. But these senior zippers need, also, to be warned that the newcomer is not their "property." They may need to be cautioned that he will get along best if, while being made to feel at home, he is permitted to stand on his own feet, and do as *he* pleases.

Freedom of Choice

There is no point in trying to list all the things seniors do in the name of fun and recreation, but some planning and pattern is desirable to give interest and continuity to the program. What people choose to do may be limited to some extent by whether there is a trained teacher or recreation leader available, whether there is a piano (or accordion or guitar) and a reliable person to play regularly, and the physical aspects of the place of meeting. Most of all, however, it will depend on what these older people themselves decide they *want to do*. There should be enough variety to the fare offered individuals and the group as a whole, so that they have a definite sense of choice.

Perhaps sociologists and psychologists can tell us whether this urge to decide for one's self is a trait that becomes more pronounced with age. Perhaps freedom of choice becomes more precious when one suspects that others are trying to infringe upon it. Perhaps emphasis on the importance of individual choice is a strong generational trait of our 60-plus population, developed from

days of youth steeped in the rugged individualism of the turn of the century. At any rate, there is *nobody* who hates to be "bossed" quite so much as an older individual hates it. He may accept it, but it is hard to imagine that he gets much value out of following a program—however good—that was set up *for* him.

He cannot, in turn, logically try to dictate for others. If the group decides to go ahead with a common plan of which he disapproves, he should not, but quite likely may, pout for a while. Then, he may get tired playing solitaire, and decide to join in the fun. The important thing is that the decisions to protest, to withdraw, and finally to participate are all his own decisions. Three decisions of his own, carried out, may be more important to that particular person, on that particular day, than the therapy of any planned program.

Incidentally, the group leader must be careful not to put a premium on the extrovert tendencies of certain members, nor confuse the well-adjusted introvert with the person withdrawn from life. This is one of the points where the amateur psychologists can really be a menace. Those responsible for hiring professional staff or training volunteers for work with older people, should impress upon them that making individuals over to fit any specific pattern is not one of their duties.

It is hoped that most older adult groups will choose programs with varying degrees of spectator and active participation.

Spectator participation might include concerts, movies, lectures, exhibits, attendance at sports events. Yet back of these activities is usually considerable physical activity in putting the program together, and making neces-

sary arrangements; the planning and execution of this falls on someone's shoulders, presumably some member of the group. Therefore no program is entirely spectator. The presumption is that the group itself will, by a subtle group process, see to it that each member discovers the type of activity for which he is best adapted.

Community singing and games give the timid ones an opportunity to start participating; they also, for the time at least, bring the overly aggressive leaders to the common level, and for both reasons are desirable features on a program. Trips to nearby parks, museums, and galleries, tours of industrial plants and scientific laboratories, can be the basis of discussion groups concerning what has been seen and lead to more general topics related to economics, communications, Christian social relations. A retired professor who showed up rather poorly at games and folk dancing, might give valued leadership in such discussions. People are never alike, and we might as well accept the gerontologists' findings that they are even more individualistic as they grow older. What's more, they like it that way.

For many individuals the group therapy of the workshop or a manual project has great value. Over looms and potter's wheels, plastic and metal work, knitting or arranging stamp exhibits, people who have drawn a curtain against the world begin once more to communicate and help their neighbors with their problems, receiving help in return. One man, a former mechanic, finds it more in his line to be a trouble shooter for the workshop equipment than to make things himself. A woman who does beautiful enamel-on-metal work, finds it a particular joy to teach newcomers the secrets of her craft. An-

other, without much manual skill, is organizing a sale for the end of the year, to which each will contribute a piece of his best work—proceeds to be used to buy needed equipment for the workshop.

The fellowship lunch has come to be accepted as next to essential in most centers and in many older adult programs not set up on the center basis. Setting the tables, serving and sharing of food, the decorating of the traditional birthday cake, and even the cleaning-up process, can be nuisance chores or a pleasant friendly experience, according to the spirit that pervades the group.

Now the sewing group announce that they have decided to devote one session each month to working on supplies for the cancer society; to stimulate interest they show the Cancer Society film. The carpentry shop is building benches from donated lumber for the kindergarten playground. A couple of members from the stamp group are visiting the veterans' hospital each week, exchanging stamps and conversation with the philatelists there.

So recreation becomes re-creation for individuals and for the group, leading them through many bypaths to the road of useful service.

The Dynamic of Recreation

It is the dynamic of recreation—the movement from spectator to participant, from self-centered attitudes of despair to the outward thrust of service and appreciation of others—in which we can see a special reason for the church's interest. The recreation group which pro-

vides only static entertainment in no way meets the responsibility which it is hoped the church is feeling for its older people.

We must also get rid of any notion that older adult recreation is only for the economically and socially underprivileged. The problems of retirement and the loneliness of age can actually be hardest on the trained individual, with a keen mind and strong body, who finds himself at 65 displaced and useless in what seems a hostile, rejecting society. Yet this man could be a tremendous asset in helping other older people, if we could just get his particular channels cleared. The retired professional man is not held back from participation in the group because he is lacking in a sense of democracy, but because we too often expect him to gear into a program quite foreign to his needs and interests. Often what we offer is a program geared to a stereotype of age which was not valid for an active senior even a generation ago, and has no relevance whatever for our new retiree of today. The gifted senior finds no interest, inspiration, or opportunity for service.

Our friend Mr. Brown is not snobbish—just bewildered. Last year he made a good salary, as his firm's head bookkeeper. But that was when he was 64. He had provided realistically for retirement and thought of putting his financial knowledge at the service of his church or church council which, he observed, could probably well use it—especially since the staff always complained of being terribly overworked. Many of the customers of the firm for which he had worked were in the lower income brackets, and Mr. Brown had also been making mental notes as to how a friendly adviser could help such people

work out their financial problems—get them off on a sounder basis of operation. With these plans for his future occupation buzzing pleasantly in his mind, he took the day of retirement in his stride. After a pleasant short vacation, he began calling on the executive of the church council, but the man was so busy with his budget that Mr. Brown never did get an appointment to see him. He shared his ideas with his pastor, who murmured something about serving on the finance committee next year, and suggested he drop in at the senior center next week. At the senior center he was cordially greeted by the director, and asked to write his name in the enrollment book. Mr. Brown noted that he was number 89, and shrewdly guessed that they were "bucking for 100 membership" for their monthly report. When he began to explain his ideas of how he might be useful, the director told him they didn't have anything of that sort, but there were classes in jewelry making, weaving, and ceramics in the adjoining room. Many people found it necessary to "retrain." Perhaps he would like to make an ashtray. Mr. Brown explained that he didn't smoke and left. It was just as well, for it was time for the director to light the candles on the birthday cake.

That story is of course apocryphal. And it is really not meant to cast any aspersions on the fine work for many older people being done in both church and community senior centers. It is meant only to raise one question: How does a person like Mr. Brown find the channel for putting his unquestionably valuable talents at the service of the church and humanity for the next ten years —and for free! Since he had earned $8000 per year, and had planned right along to work full time at his "re-

tirement job" this was the equivalent of a gift of $80,000!

The problem of tapping and focusing the resources of potential leadership—either in a specific subject related to aging or in group work and interpersonal relations—deserves serious attention. It is, moreover, a matter which the churches, with their concern for persons, should face with confidence and authority. The churches need to give prompt and thoughtful attention to the matter of recruiting competent leadership for senior activities from the ranks of their own new retirees, making use of the talents they have, and supplementing these talents with special training in group work and a knowledge of aging—its problems and opportunities. This is a wonderful opening, which the religious forces of the community will not want to let go by default.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Action Groups and Ballot Boxes

A person who has been raised in the Hebrew-Christian faith, believes in himself and recognizes his obligation to act responsibly in the community.

Churches differ in the degree of guidance they offer their members on specific political and social issues, but agree that in a democracy the individual is bound to speak, act, and influence others according to his conscience. The church will stand beside the person who speaks out for needed laws, and tries to help elect people who, in his judgment, are best qualified for office. It will not necessarily endorse his findings, but it will defend to the limit the obligation he feels to work for good objectives through political channels.

The relation of the church to its older members has these four special implications which we shall amplify in the balance of the chapter:

• The confidence of minister and congregation as a whole will strengthen the older person to withstand any temptation to accept an appraisal of himself as a second-class citizen, whose opinions do not have real weight.

- The church, in the days ahead, might need to remind the older person that he is part of, and essentially responsible to, society as a whole, not to any power bloc that acts and votes for special privilege— even special privilege for himself.
- The church will challenge him to raise his sights and work for goals that are worthy of the new leisure and independence with which his generation has been entrusted.
- The church can be of very practical help in suggesting channels through which he can work for the cause of his choice.

The First-Class Citizen

We have already suggested that perhaps the most important thing in an older person's life is how he thinks about himself, and that in this his church contacts play an important part. The elderly person who is going to work effectively will be neither a cringer nor a boaster. One of the effective ways to keep him from assuming either of these roles is to encourage him to lose himself in a cause that is bigger than he is—a cause so interesting that his own personal ups and downs (with which so many older people entertain family and neighbors) fade into insignificance. Could anything react more favorably to the popularity of an older person?

Not Power Politics

Politicians, usually very good at mathematics of sorts, have not been slow to realize that over 15 million voters

(over 65) can't be wrong. Nor will demagogues be slow to try to weld the strength represented into a power bloc for their own purpose. Our guess is that they will be disappointed. There is nothing quite so independent as an intelligent older person. Moreover, older people have time to "read up" and investigate, listen to all sides. It would not be easy to fool them over a period of time. Mob rule and power blocs start with people who are ignorant or driven to the point of desperation. Neither of these conditions prevails in this country.

We are not saying that the church will not support the older population in its demands for decent housing, adequate health protection, educational and cultural opportunities. It is hard to see how the church can, logically, fail to give such demands full support, though there may be honest differences of opinion as to ways and means. If the church gives this basic support, these demands, made not on a basis of pressure politics, but on the recognition of the human rights involved, will be achieved as a normal outgrowth of our democratic process.

Worthy Goals

Among the people who approach retirement with the most satisfaction and gusto, are those who plan to use their bonus years working for causes close to their hearts.

Some older people will have been so engrossed in making a living during their middle years that they will hardly know how to go about pursuing an objective that has no economic measuring line. Some will have been so hurt by the shock of forced retirement

from a job which seemed to them to be their life, or from being treated, in retirement, like third-class citizens, that they will need encouragement and counseling to discover new fields of interest. Many, many, will content themselves with very small, safe goals, and will need to be encouraged and challenged to use their talents in something exciting and wonderful and worthy of these added "free" decades of their lives.

An avocation during middle years is the best bridge to a happy retirement, and if the avocational interest involves a challenging cause, big enough and worthy enough to grow into a major life interest, then the loneliness and sense of useless futility which is the saddest part of aging for so many people, may never have to be experienced.

For many people, that cause will be related to the church itself. People who have been brought up in an atmosphere of Christian nurture have learned about missions, youth work, social action, the ecumenical movement, religious art and symbolism, theology—to mention only a few phases of religious experience. They have probably explored some one field with special interest, and know a good deal about it. They have probably also formed habits of service to others which will carry over into their retirement years.

The object of their concern may be very concrete and local: support of a mission church, representing the church on the city welfare commission, holding office in the local unit of United Church Women, raising money to build an addition to the church, leading an adult class. In retirement years, with more time to invest, these interests may intensify and at the same time be-

come broader in their scope, and they may merge with other lines of interest, developed in clubs or civic organizations through the years, to establish a really challenging motivation, worthy in itself, and also important in the physical, psychological, and spiritual lift it gives the person who harbors it.

A person can seldom if ever see the whole future of the "causes" with which he is becoming involved. The church is often in a position to inspire and motivate and sometimes to give sound practical advice, or refer the mid-ager, thinking about his future, to the resources he needs for making a wise decision—neither too reckless nor so "sensible" that life in his later years will be dull.

We have continually emphasized that one of the best bridges over the crisis of retirement is a continuing interest in the work and fellowship of the church. But the church is well aware that its witness cannot stop within the walls of the church building, nor in the organizational framework of the church—even in its broader geographic aspects. The church must make its witness in the world, and now, in retirement, the church member can redefine his interests and objectives in the broadest possible terms and work for them through all sorts of channels. He will work with no less enthusiasm for his local church, but he may find that he has more opportunity to broaden his concept of the church and to carry the church's influence into fields outside the church's organization.

A person who has worked for years in the social welfare program of his own church, for instance, might find himself interested in what his local and state coun-

cil of churches are doing in this field—or what the parallel programs are in the national or world councils. A person who has been involved in the international relations program of his denomination may reach out to take up in a serious way a study of the United Nations, and find time to work on behalf of the causes it stands for through the American Association for the United Nations.

Happy the person who in middle age finds the cause which challenges his abilities, and in which his interest and concern are so great that he waits impatiently to be able to devote more and more planned time to it after he retires. Moreover, the staff person interested in helping him achieve this happy state will be thinking in terms of wider horizons and higher stakes—not just more and more work.

So many and worthy are the varied goals to which people might devote their later years, that there is little use in trying to list categories. Each person's goal will be unique. Yet each person will find others whose goals are sufficiently similar so that they can work together to bring about some mutually desired objective.

It is quite possible, of course, for a man to work for a great cause all by himself, but in the organizational world in which we live today, he usually finds it more effective, more inspiring, and much more stimulating and pleasant, to work with other like-minded people. Long before retirement he is probably a member of a number of groups, but there is no guarantee that his former connections will afford him the kind of activity he needs in line with the rethought motivation of his life. He may want to examine the way he has been

spending his spare time and decide frankly whether it is a good idea to enlarge on the same pattern or change.

It should also be clear that however broad his vision, however high his motivation, he may start through doing simple tasks through channels which are near at hand.

A business woman, with no children of her own, had an intense love of all young people and an interest in their welfare. Over a period of years she had been a sponsor of a young people's group in her church, but had had time for little else besides her job. As she began to talk about retiring, her very wise pastor saw to it that she was appointed to represent the council of churches at a state-wide meeting of youth workers, where she realized for the first time the scope of the work being carried on by public and private agencies in this field. She began working with the local YWCA and later represented them at national conferences. She worked busily and happily, and with increasing wisdom in youth work the rest of her days, yet always remembering that it was in the small group in her own church where her interest had its first impetus, and always giving them a priority in her busy schedule.

Another woman had for years found release from the boredom of a very dull clerical job by taking evening courses in art. She decided that painting and sculpture could be a wonderful therapeutic force in the lives of many routine workers. With the sponsorship of the women's group of her church, she made arrangements to try out some original ideas at one of the city park clubhouses during her summer vacation. When she retired, she went on to develop these ideas in classes and lec-

tures and articles. She was never a great artist, but in her humble way, she was happy to devote her retirement days to an idea in which she wholeheartedly believed and which brought a great deal of happiness to the students who worked with her.

For many persons approaching their bonus years, the greatest challenge of all lies in helping to build a more peaceful world. Here is a goal big enough to fill anyone's later years, and one which the church will be happy to help the older person attain to the full extent of his capacities. It is one, too, which will touch on any number of related goals, and can use many different kinds of talents and experience.

We must clarify at once that the peace for which the church can suggest that older people—or any people—give a full measure of devotion, is a peace with liberty, equality, and honor—not a working agreement with tyranny nor a personal peace at the price of conflict for others. It is a dynamic peace, not one of indolence and stagnation. In the last decades the churches have lost much of the initiative in the discussion of peace. The church can encourage its older people, in the dignity and wisdom of their years, to seize again the initiative in proclaiming the cause of peace.

Though peace is one of the greatest challenges of the world, it is not beyond the most humble person to start working at it here and now, and to devote whatever time and talents he possesses to the cause. One group of older persons in a church council formed an organization known as Senior Peacebuilders, which later was incorporated as a private nonprofit agency. Their proposition is that the way to work for peace is to make a

constant effort to "push out the borders of the peaceful areas of life."

Noting that older people today have, as a class, more free time to invest, according to their own discretion, than any comparable adults in history, the Senior Peacebuilders suggest that they have, perhaps, been "providentially freed in their later years to make an all-out witness for peace." It is suggested that as more and more older people do this, and especially as they do it together, they will, step by step, at the grassroots level, make real progress toward a more peaceful world. Many church publications have endorsed the idea.

These Senior Peacebuilders are expected to build peace at various levels. At the personal and family level, they may endeavor to mend quarrels within their families; they can avoid using "name-calling" words; tune out unwarranted violence on TV; observe a daily quiet hour; or write a song or poem on a peace theme. At the community level they might, for instance, work with community groups to resolve race tensions; invite "outsiders" to their homes and clubs and churches; join or form discussion groups to study peace projects; write editors or broadcasters on subjects relating to peace. At national or world level, but still working, probably, in their own local community, they can get an overseas pen pal; start a campaign against weapon toys; volunteer to work in the local office of the American Association for the United Nations; or perhaps they will discover ways to act as "peace ambassadors" on vacations near home or trips overseas.

The possibilities are nothing if not varied, and each individual and each local group are encouraged to tailor-

make their own program to fit their own interests, abilities, and local conditions.

Channels

We cannot begin to mention the hundreds of organizations, working for worthy causes, which would welcome the affiliation of sincere older people; they can afford, therefore, to analyze their own interests and choose with discretion through which group they will invest their time. It is sometimes necessary for the enthusiastic older person to be reminded that he is only one person and that it is not wise to drive himself to the full limit of his endurance even for good causes.

Every church needs a staff person or committee chairman with responsibility for community volunteer contacts. Such volunteers are invaluable; it is hard to see how the ongoing cultural, recreational, and health programs of our modern civilization could get along without them. The training many church people have had in organizational work and service programs in the church, makes them in special demand. Often the older volunteer is exactly the right person. If there is a senior fellowship in the church, the members may have a "volunteer chairman" for connecting the right person with the right job. The task of matching willing hands to needed work in hospitals, playgrounds, parks, schools, welfare organizations, is of great importance. Yet even more important is the responsibility of matching the right person to the right *cause*. It is a wise counselor who can suggest to a person approaching retirement an objective that may keep him awake at night with the

absorption of developing exciting plans rather than with the insomnia of worry and boredom. To be considered, too, is whether the person looking for "new channels" is one who can best gear in through working with his hands in a useful activity (many of the health organizations offer such opportunities); whether he has special talents and long training to contribute to a special field (like the teacher who served international friendship by helping foreign students with language problems); whether he likes people and organization, and could break into the field of his choice through a community fund drive; or whether he is impatient for action and will give his all to a political pressure group working, let us say, on an urban renewal program.

Sometimes a person's dreams, experience, apparent abilities and immediate contacts are so unrelated that he needs help to decide whether what he has chosen as a goal is a burning devotion or a passing fancy, and whether he can, realistically, believe he would go through the self-discipline and retraining involved. If the counselor keeps the focus on the over-all goal in which a person is interested, then usually some channel of appropriate activity can be discovered and substituted, by the person's own choice, for less appropriate plans. He has kept his goal, selected the channel through which he will work for it, and will probably be happy. All this is not in the usual content of pre-retirement courses, but it would seem to be an especially appropriate approach for the church, and a most gratifying one for the elderly person involved.

One of the liveliest arenas in which an older person can work is politics. What a retired person does through

his political connections need be no less a demonstration of his basic religious motivation, than what he does directly through his church. Working in the political field may be harder, for a person will be much more on his own and more subject to pressures and misunderstandings. He needs, therefore, more than ever, to know that the church is with him, that it recognizes what he is doing as being of great importance in a country which seeks to maintain its fundamentally religious orientation, along with the traditional separation of church and state. To what extent the church gives any guidance or open political support, and at what point the individual must be asked to work out his own political salvation, is a matter for denominational determination, but that there is room for hard-working Christian statesmen at all levels in our democracy can hardly be denied, and those who have had a long-standing interest in politics seldom wonder what to do in their retirement years. Other retirees will find time at long last to perform their political duties in a more nearly satisfying manner.

Under interdenominational leadership, a council of churches might well set up a school for Christian statesmen—not to argue issues, but to study techniques for the person who, believing in the democratic pattern of life, wants to prepare to use his later years to serve God and country through the channel of political action.

The church which is interested in helping its older people become Christian statesmen, might consider with them ways of achieving the following six objectives:

- Older persons, stepping up their participation in the field of politics, will aim to become increasingly well

informed—by attending meetings, listening to speeches on radio and TV, making use of the library, including current periodicals. Probably few persons, during a lifetime, ever feel that they enter an election booth as thoroughly informed as they would like to be. In retirement, people can more nearly approach this satisfaction.

Good citizens must be informed about local candidates and issues as well as about the more glamorous national elections. Precinct politics may lack appeal, but it is at this level that most political figures get their start. The older person who has no ambitions for himself, may like to discover how good a political scout he is.

A group of older Christian statesmen trainees would want to familiarize themselves with the vast amount of material available through government sources, voluntary agencies, union and management groups, the League of Women Voters. Some denominational groups publish material, as do the National Council of Churches and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

Church leadership will point out that one must, of course, read all sides of any issue, and discount the bias of sources.

• The Christian statesman will also consider how he can participate in the formation of opinion. He may not feel at home in a ward hall, but he must realize that he won't change it by staying away. He can at least join community groups within which he can have a voice, and whose organizational weight is considerable: veterans' groups, unions and trade associations, service clubs, professional and business organizations. There

are issues upon which he will feel compelled to speak out at church meetings, too.

• The Christian statesman will take pains to communicate his convictions—for instance to his congressmen, editors, broadcasters. There are techniques for doing this effectively which he may need to learn.

• It goes without saying that he will try to vote intelligently, but it needs to be repeated that intelligent voting refers to local school board elections as well as presidential campaigns. It is wholly appropriate for the church to point out that if discretionary time is to be largely in the hands of older people, then this older cross section of our American population has a responsibility to help keep democracy alive, cherish it, and labor over it on a day-by-day basis, and with the help of God make it work. Plato warned the human race a long time ago that the penalty good men pay for not being interested in politics is to be governed by men worse than themselves.

• Some elder Christian statesmen will want to run for office. It is a fine idea and more power to them! What is more, politics seems to be a field where there is little age discrimination. If they had been applying for work in an industrial organization, most of our national presidents, supreme court judges, and legislative leaders would never have gotten as far as the personnel office. The young receptionist would have turned them away on a basis of age—no use wasting time interviewing *them.*

A recent check revealed that forty-three U. S. Senators were over 60, fifteen past 65. Only one in five was under 50. The House of Representatives was somewhat

younger, but in both houses leadership was definitely in the hands of the older members.

• Most of all, every church can encourage its older people themselves—and younger ones too—to live democratically in their everyday lives. It can teach them to beware of demagogues and power politics, whether at home or abroad. It can also point out that the person who stands aloof from politics has little right to complain over the results. Many a good liberal cause has been taken over by the radical mobsters in the wee small hours after the good Christians went home to sleep. The elder statesmen of the church have a great advantage: in retirement they can probably take a nap early in the day, and be ready to stay with any important meeting till the last vote is taken!

There has been a great deal written in theological circles during recent years about the witness of the laity in their daily work. This applies to the older person's service through voluntary agencies and political groups, just as much as it does to the younger person's work in a trade or profession.

The availability of such a block of discretionary time, talent, and willingness to serve, as these older people have at their command, is something new in history. The church will do well to take the possibilities seriously.

The church can help these older people with leadership training, choosing immediate and long-term targets for their efforts, deciding on strategy and tactics, selecting the most appropriate church and community organizations through which to work.

Older people are looking to the church for help in understanding and adapting to their new role in society. But the church is looking to its older people, too. It should take pains to let them know that the church and the world need their wisdom and empathy and patience, and also the fortitude and enthusiasm of which they are capable, as civilization takes off on an exciting upswing toward the world of tomorrow.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Wholeness of Life

GOD, when he declared his intention to create man in his own image, surely did not intend him to spend the last third of his life in useless idleness. The two ideas are incompatible.

Neither do we discern the hand of the Lord in the trend toward isolating older people from the common society of people in general. The Lord arranged for people to dwell together in families, apparently expecting old, young, and middle-aged to have day-by-day beneficial contacts with each other. Such integration does not, of course, mean that all members of a biological tribe have to live under one roof.

Not all misconceptions about aging are those held by young people. It is as foolish for older people to deny, categorically, that a lessening of physical strength and speed usually comes with age as it is for young folk to insist that their elders are all senile and decrepit. Each person is an individual, not a type or a statistic; and the pattern of his life, especially as he grows older, needs

to be built around his individual characteristics, needs, and capacities.

The pattern of life is not a gradual rise from birth to a peak of physical, mental, and spiritual achievement at around 40, then an increasingly precipitous decline in all three areas to back where we started. There is very little mental deterioration in most cases till a really advanced age (and not necessarily then); spiritually the upward curve continues and may be accelerated.

In the work patterns of our industrial world, we have been making a very serious mistake of shelving older people on the simple, routine jobs which are considered suitable for the beginner. In these jobs the senior's decreasing physical strength is a real handicap and puts him at a disadvantage in comparison with the young. Moreover, such jobs are geared to learning to obey orders, rather than responsible thinking and acting on one's own initiative. The older person's plus assets of originality and initiative are actually penalized.

In short, our appraisal and casting of older persons during the past decades has not been in accord with biological and social reality. But our thinking is so entrenched in economics that we carry over employment patterns to various areas of our life. As a consequence, even most seniors seem inclined to accept, but not without resentment and bitterness, a role as members of a second-class, tolerated, declining segment of society.

This is not only morally wrong: it is decidedly stupid. Seniors constitute—already—a crucial 16 per cent of our adult (voter!) population. The temptation to use them for power politics, the invitation to demagogues to form power blocs in our democracy, is obvious. But what a

pity and disgrace if it must be on this account that we change our tactics!

The worth of every individual in the sight of God is a basic concept of the Hebrew-Christian faith; the church has known its days of greatness when it has remembered this. In the present situation, the church is called upon to be the champion not only of the aged and aging in its own membership, but to speak, in the community and nation, on behalf of all older people as a dispossessed group. It is hoped that as a new day for older people dawns, a great deal of leadership will come from their own ranks, and that those approaching retirement can be helped to see the opportunities for such leadership as a challenge.

Many individuals and groups are working valiantly to discover the proper role of the retiree in society. A tremendous amount of social research is being done in the universities. Many volunteer agencies and foundations have made substantial grants for training and research and publication of pertinent materials.

The church must, however, be the spokesman for the principle which is at the very vortex of all such concerns —the worth of every individual of whatever age or condition, as a member of God's family. The church has spoken eloquently on behalf of victims of war and starvation; on behalf of migrants, child workers, labor in general. It has spoken for people of all parts of the world whose human rights were in jeopardy, for theological students, American Indians, prisoners, psychotics—and teen-agers!

The church will wish, also, to give its full support in directing the future of our aging population into chan-

nels of dignity, usefulness, and service. A few denominations have already specifically included the aged in social welfare budgets. Others regard it as a concern of Christian education. Some have sizeable and well-managed nursing homes. One is contemplating a broad program parallel to its youth work. But general budgets and staff personnel to deal with the over-all lives of aging *persons* have been slow in materializing.

Many local churches have eased their consciences about the whole matter by setting up social clubs where old people of the community can meet once a week to do some craft work, sing old-time songs, eat snack lunches, have a birthday cake, and folk dance. In a few inspired instances, such local centers, under devoted personnel, have been able to develop valuable and constructive programs—often by teaming up with available community funds and facilities.

It is, however, at a deeper level that the church's unique contribution lies. The church will not be content to see that older persons are housed and entertained, or even that acceptable patterns are worked out to provide them with the therapy—and income—of jobs.

It is necessary, and urgent, for the pastors and members of the congregation to accept the older members—and older people of the community—as *whole persons,* with their own special and significant contribution to make to the ongoing pattern of life. The church must help older persons, and especially new retirees and pre-retirees, to think of themselves in these terms. It must tell them by word and action that there are no second-class citizens in God's kingdom. Programs which the churches provide, personnel whom they train for work

with the aging in either the church or the community, must demonstrate this conviction.

It is highly appropriate for the church to give much thought to helping people live their increasing life spans to the fullest, using all the capacities and talents with which the Lord continues to bless them.

In doing this, the church will in turn find *itself* richly blessed, and discover new and potent resources for its ongoing ministry and spiritual renewal.

APPENDIX A

The Commission on the Church's Responsibility to Older Persons, of the Northern California-Nevada Council of Churches, drew up a "Memo to the Churches," in which it sought to explore some of the present opportunities in the field of aging. This memorandum was subsequently submitted to religious leaders and authorities on gerontology across the country for comments and suggestions, many of which were incorporated in the document.

We quote it in full as a background for discussion.

The Church's Responsibility to Older Persons

A Memo to the Churches
from the
Commission on the Church's Responsibility
to Older Persons
Northern California-Nevada Council of Churches
83 McAllister Street, San Francisco 2

I. LET THE CHURCH BE A "WHOLE" CHURCH.

The church must be aware, through its preaching and teaching, of the worth of each individual—including its

elder members. Teachers should inculcate respect for the traditional assets of age. Older people should be encouraged to be worthy of such respect, both as they take part in general church activities and as they form special age groups for whatever purpose. Churches, as they take inventory of their resources, will give special attention to the potential talents of the elder members of the congregation. These talents are changing. Some older people could give valuable hours to specific church tasks. But beware of exploitation!

A. As people approach their later years, many begin to reach out for *spiritual reassurance.* The minister must find time for giving the spiritual counsel his older members need. They should be remembered in sermon material and choice of hymns. Ways must be found, possibly through a planned program of trained lay visitation, to help those who have been outside the church to find the way—unembarrassed —inside the church's doors and into a genuine fellowship.

B. With the increasing life span, the church finds itself faced with more calls for *family counseling*— about the give-and-take required if three generations are to live compatibly in one house or apartment, problems of personal responsibility in family situations, problems of privacy and co-operation, etc. What about grandparents "unwilling to give up the reins"? In addition to the pastor's help and/ or referral to community resources, councils of churches could set up conferences, bringing in sociologists and other appropriate lay counsel. Sound literature on the subject from a Christian perspective is needed; religious broadcasters and script writers could help.

C. The churches should study the needs of the older citizens of their own constituencies and communities to discover whether there are *specific needs of older people* which can best be met through the church as the church. This survey might lead to church related housing schemes, senior Bible study classes, or church "extension courses" for home study, home-visiting teams, fellowship groups, or recreational activities—all aimed avowedly at keeping the oldster a lively, interested, and contributing member of the church. It might show special necessity for senior service clubs, through which seniors would experience the giving of themselves as even more blessed than receiving. Older people should at least participate in and might well initiate the making of such a survey.

D. Integration into the *full fellowship* of the church is the ideal, rather than age segregation. The church should strive for balance as between youth and age in both membership and leadership of all church activity. Age should be represented (not necessarily as such) on church and council boards. There should be young members on the committee on aging.

E. One important aspect of the service which the churches can perform for their older members (and for others in preparation for retirement) is to *stimulate people to enrich their later years with new interests and responsibilities,* and not only within the church but also in the areas of community welfare and social betterment. At this time, the critical need for concentration of all Christians on steps toward peace and away from the current drift toward nuclear war should involve all age groups.

Since retired persons usually have more free time than others, they have a special obligation to their fellow men.

F. *Concern for the shut-in or incapacitated* is a must for any church's conscience. Visiting, personal delivery of the church bulletin, loan of recordings of worship services or music, flowers, birthday cards, occasional small gifts, letter writing (to or for), automobile outings, are some of the ways the church members can demonstrate Christian love to this specialized group, many of whom will be among its elder members.

G. Older people are frequently well equipped to perform certain pastoral functions on behalf of the church and should be encouraged to do so within their capacities. Shut-ins can participate, for instance, in an organized *ministry of intercessory prayer.*

II. LET THE CHURCH CO-OPERATE WITH COMMUNITY AGENCIES AND GROUPS.

A. The churches (perhaps through the council of churches) should be officially and competently *represented on community—county—state—national—councils on aging,* and take such responsibility seriously.

B. Councils of churches, through member churches, should keep Christians *informed about legislation,* social security regulations, housing programs, medical services, financial assistance, etc., for the aging, upon which as groups or individuals they may wish to take a stand. Churches should see that they also have representation on special committees related

to senior citizen concerns; *e.g.,* on a committee for a community senior citizen housing project, or a survey of nursing home standards.

C. The churches should encourage members as individuals to help in *community senior citizen centers* and to use their influence to hold them to high standards in every respect.

D. The church or church council should help initiate and carry forward in co-operation with major community industries and organizations, community surveys of community needs of the aging; *e.g.,* low-cost housing for retired people. It could also help to set up institutes on mature living for the pre-retirement group in the community. Such institutes might deal with health and diet, grooming to one's age, how to set up a one-man business, the charms of philately, how to apply for a pension or make a will.

E. The council of churches might undertake to *call to the attention of newspapers or other channels of communication stories of outstanding achievement* by older persons—so that other seniors or those approaching retirement may be inspired and encouraged.

F. The council of churches should send out *information about courses* in adult education of special interest to older persons, or about gerontology, and should encourage educational centers to set up and promote such courses.

G. Church and church council committees must co-operate with civic groups, state and national commissions, local centers, etc., in every way possible.

Conversely, church groups can often *be enriched by the use of freely offered community resources.* A craft teacher from one school district was made available to a church's senior center. State universities' extension divisions are often willing to send teachers on various subjects to groups requesting them (15 class members minimum in California).

III. LET THE CHURCH SERVE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

A. The church must make it evident that *all are welcome,* not only at Sunday services but also at social events. Especially in changing communities, this may require evangelistic visitation.

B. There should be church and *church council committees* set up to explore the special concerns of the aging in the community, and make recommendations through appropriate channels. Be sure there is both youth and senior representation on these committees.

C. If satisfying *senior centers* are not available through community facilities, the church or churches may decide to set up a center as a service to all oldsters of the area. Such a center should be under a competent board of seniors and nonseniors, including trained professionals.

D. The church should make its *facilities* available for, *e.g.,* senior discussion groups, an oldsters' little theater project or concert or a community-sponsored senior center—not as schemes to build church membership, but as a service to the people involved.

E. The church should encourage its mature members to *volunteer through the church or as individuals,*

for appropriate community service: storytelling or teaching crafts at playgrounds; "grey lady" service in hospitals; grandmothering children in an orphanage; baby-sitting while young mothers serve a particular community cause for which they are better qualified because of their youth; "canvassing" for worthy drives; furnishing speakers for community forums on peace, race relations, or adequate schools; providing publicity for significant community events or causes, etc.

F. Reference and referral: The church or church council might maintain a library of book and pamphlet material on aging, and a trained *referral service* if none is available on a community basis. It could also maintain employment (or job information) service and a housing registry for oldsters and encourage their use. A labor exchange, or a "labor bank," or an organization of competent older women for volunteer or paid "homemaker" service (to help families in temporary crises) is a possibility.

G. A group of retired professional people in a church could set up a *clinic for older members of the community*. A retired doctor or registered nurse, a lawyer, financial adviser, teacher, religious worker, social worker, employment expert, could offer to make their services available, singly, in groups, or as a complete team, to other "oldsters" of the community. This service would not be competing with professional services offered in the community; it would seek, rather, to help older people spot their own problems and find the right channels for solving them. In relation to such a group the church could sponsor a series of community lectures or forums on preparedness for aging, diet and health,

obligations of citizenship in a democracy. They could make speakers on preparedness for aging available to service clubs, women's clubs, lodges, etc.

Especially, perhaps, in dealing with the older person who is rounding out his span of years, the church should remember that religion deals with the whole of life and will do what it can, through whatever channels, to help the "oldster" round out *his* career as a person and a Christian, to the fullness of his physical, mental, and spiritual capacity.

APPENDIX B

Some Basic Statistics

The population of the United States in 1958 included 15.2 million people over 65: 6.9+ million men, 8.2+ million women. Fifty million people (29% of total population) are over 45. U. S. population has doubled in the past fifty years; the 45-64 group has trebled; the 65-plus group has quadrupled. By 1975, statisticians estimate, the 65-plus group will number 21 million (10% of the total)—a potential political and economic bloc to be taken seriously.

Life expectancy during the first half of the century went from 49 to 68 years.

Fewer than one in five of the 65-plus group has a paying job (2,110,000 men and 700,000 women) and then not usually a full-time job or one in any way comparable to former employment. The proportion holding jobs is growing smaller. In 1890 seven out of ten men over 65 were in the labor force; in 1945 it was five out of ten.

Median income (1954) for a person over 65 who was head of a family unit was $2,249; comparable income for family heads aged 55-64 was $4,052. Average income for persons over 65 living alone or with nonrelatives was $796. For 1957, 60% of the over-65's reported incomes under $1000, but 19% of the over-65's had incomes of $25,000

or more. Between 8 and 12% of the men over 65 report no money income (as compared with one or two per cent of those 25-54 and 4 or 5% of those 55-64). Forty per cent of the women over 65 report no money income, but many of these are married and living with earner husbands. Over 1½ million persons eligible for social security continue to work.

Old age (welfare) allotments go to 2,510,000, averaging $61.79 monthly.

Forty-five per cent of all family units headed by a person over 65 have financial assets (*e.g.*, available bank deposits) of less than $500—many have none at all. Thirty-five per cent have assets of $2000 or more. Median assets (1957) for OASI beneficiaries was $2,800 for couples, $2,600 for widows, $1,950 for single retired workers.

About half of the 65-plus group had some—usually very small—income from rents, dividends, interest, etc., but 65% of the couples and 75% of the single workers got less than $75 per year from such sources. One and one-half million people receive some sort of annuity.

Median equity in nonfarm homes owned by OASI beneficiaries in 1957 was about $8000 for couples and widows; $6000 for single retired workers. (Figures do not include persons who have *no* equity in a home.)

One and one-fourth million persons over 65 received some sort of private pensions in 1958 (compared to 400,000 recipients in 1948).

About 7 million people are drawing retired worker social security, and nearly as many more (some of whom are over 65) are being paid husband or wife, survivor, or disability claims. Retired worker claims in September, 1958, amounted to $458,478,000.

Average monthly old-age social security benefits in February, 1959, were $72; the recently retired were averaging $85 per month. Widows, receiving only 75% of the

allowance of a retired worker, had the lowest incomes, but this was being compensated for by the fact that more and more women nearing 60 are getting back into the labor force, or are getting jobs outside the home for the first time, in order to draw social security as workers instead of widows.

Twenty per cent of the 65-plus group received some income from some sort of social insurance in 1948. In June, 1958, the comparable figure was about 67% (10.4 million persons). This tremendous growth was due largely simply to the maturing of the social security system.

Aggregate income of the 65-plus population from all sources is now between 24 and 27 billion dollars annually. But this includes some of the country's highest individual incomes. The highest and the lowest incomes (and no incomes at all) are in the 65-plus group, so a statistical average would not reveal a true picture.

Forty per cent of today's aged are widowed or divorced. Twenty per cent are not married or are not living with spouse. There are 14 men to 17 women. Sixty per cent of the 65-74 year-old women and 82% of those over 75 are unmarried. Widows (half the women over 65) are the group worst off economically; couples are the best off.

Two and one-half million people over 45 are involved in formal programs of adult education; half a million are in the 60-74 age bracket and half a million are 75-plus. Many are taking refresher or how-to-do-it courses with a view to gainful employment. (Adult Educ. Assn. figures.)

Medical and especially hospital expenses are a major problem for the people in their 50's and 60's. Sixty-five per cent of the over-65's have no hospital insurance; only 34% of the people under 65 lack some such protection. Hospital costs have recently increased 105%, general medical costs 49%, in comparison with a general cost of living increase of 24%.

Among older people a million die yearly from some breakdown of the circulatory system; a quarter million die yearly from cancer. A million suffer from arthritis or allied conditions. Half the hospital beds are filled with persons with nervous system disorders—many of these are in the older age brackets. It is such illnesses and the specific damage they cause, not just added years of life, that make us "old." A major breakthrough in any of these fields would probably vastly extend man's expected life span. Worry over the possibility of having to meet the costs of a major accident or illness, is a contributing cause to aging.

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